Pablo Gilabert   **"Alienation, Freedom, and Dignity"**

1. Introduction

The topic of alienation has fallen out of fashion in social and political philosophy. It used to be salient, especially in socialist thought and in debates about labor practices in capitalism. As Castoriadis once put it, capitalism has the peculiarity of having (more than any previous economic system) made work utterly central to people's lives while at the same time having the tendency to render it "absurd"—a site of frustration of people's self-determination and self-realization rather than a medium for their expression.[1] Famously, Marx criticized capitalism for constituting a form of economic life in which workers are not at one with themselves and with others. They do not control their productive activities, their talents and creative potentials are stunted rather than unfolded, and they relate to their bosses, other workers and consumers in primarily instrumental and even hostile ways rather than on terms of mutual service or fellowship.[2] The lack of identification of people with their working lives—their alienation as workers—remains an important practical issue. However, despite the obvious practical significance of alienation, normative engagement with it has been set back by four important worries.[3] First, it seems to presuppose a false essentialist picture of human beings as somehow having certain trans-historical, constant features that define them independently of how they shape and see themselves in their various social contexts. Secondly, it is not clear whether judgments about alienation are prudential judgments about the good life or moral judgments about right and wrong conduct and institutions, and how judgments of the two types should relate in the critique of alienation. Third, the critique of alienation seems to lead to favoring paternalistic imposition of forms of life on those deemed to be alienated, and thus to disrespect their freedom to author their own lives. Finally, alienated work may not be problematic if the institutions underpinning it are democratically authorized. In this paper, I seek a way to re-cast the critique of alienation that vindicates its importance for social and political philosophy and rebuts these charges. I do this by articulating discussion of alienation in terms of the ideas of positive freedom and human dignity. I argue that human dignity grounds a solidaristic requirement to support positive freedom, which enables people to counter alienation.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 offers an analytic framework to understand alienation—distinguishing its various definitional, explanatory, and normative dimensions. The Marxian discussion of alienated labor is used as a paradigmatic example. Section 3 accounts for the normative dimension of the critique of alienation by articulating it in terms of prudential and moral ideas of positive freedom regarding human flourishing and solidaristic empowerment. This proposal needs to be developed further to counter the four objections to normative engagement with alienation. This is done in section 4 with the introduction of the dignitarian approach—the view that we have reason to organize social life in such a way that we respond appropriately to the valuable features of individual human beings that give rise to their dignity.

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[1] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Le Contenu du Socialisme* (Paris : Éditions 10/18, 1979), 110.
[2] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," in R. Tucker, ed.*, The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 66-125.
[3] There are also political causes, such as the failure of influential labor and leftist organizations to challenge Taylorist (top-down, de-skilling) frameworks of production. On this failure, some exceptions, and a call for focusing on the quality of work besides its duration and remuneration, see Thomas Coutrot, *Libérer le Travail* (Paris: Seuil, 2018). For a survey of (and call for more) empirical research on alienation at work see Dan Chiaburu, Tomas Thundiyil, and Jiexin Wang, "Alienation and its Correlates: A Meta-Analysis," *European Management Journal* 32 (2014), 24-36.

2. Alienation

2.1. *Basic definition*. At a minimum, "alienation" is used to refer to a state or process of separation or division—of lack of unity, harmony, or connectedness. This disunity occurs between a subject S and some object O in certain circumstances C. S is usually taken to be a person or an agent capable of self-knowledge and self-assessment. O, in turn, may be aspects of the natural world, other people, or the agent themselves. C, finally, may range over various material and social background factors.[4]

2.2. *Subjective and objective alienation*. Alienation may be subjective or objective. Judgments about subjective alienation make ineliminable reference to the attitudes of S (to S's desires, beliefs, or experience). They say, for example, that S *feels* a lack of unity with O. Judgements about objective alienation, by contrast, say that there *is* a lack of unity between S and O, whether S takes that disunity to exist or not.[5] They say, for example, that S is at odds with themselves by failing to develop their talents.

As pointed out by Leopold,[6] this distinction generates four possible cases for consideration. There could be (a) subjective alienation and objective alienation; (b) no subjective alienation but objective alienation; (c) subjective alienation but no objective alienation; and (d) neither subjective nor objective alienation. In his discussion of modern society, Marx tends to focus on case (a), in which workers fail to develop their capacities for free and solidaristic cooperation and feel dissatisfied with such a condition. Hegel, in turn, tends to focus on (c), saying that agents fail to understand the reasonability of their predicament. Both Marx and Hegel yearn for a society in which (d) holds, but they construe the change leading to it differently, with Hegel seeing it mostly as a matter of change in self-understanding, and Marx as requiring also a change in material and social circumstances. Finally, case (b) has been explored by critical theorists from the Frankfurt School tradition, who are particularly attuned to scenarios in which agents fail to act autonomously and self-realize but happen to be rather content.

Let us consider in some more detail Marx's account. He starts with objective alienation and explores the subjective responses to it. According to Marx, people are self-alienated when their actual condition is at odds with their human nature—whether they are aware of it or not.[7] Their actual condition is a set of activities in certain material and social circumstances, and their human nature is a set of capacities. In particular, Marx takes human beings to have certain capacities for

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[4] I partly follow here the lucid analysis in David Leopold, "Alienation," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016), sect. 1. My analysis differs in making explicit mention of circumstances C. Furthermore, it does not use "problematic" when referring to the disunity stated in the basic definition, as I think that this obscures the distinction between descriptive and normative accounts, which I add as a separate point in my analysis. Although "alienation" is often (perhaps typically?) used with normative intent, it is theoretically fruitful to make the distinction. Finally, I also distinguish between prudential and moral aspects of the normative dimension of alienation. I thank David Leopold for discussion on the moves made in this section.

[5] Since the psychological life of S is part of what S is, subjective alienation is an instance of objective alienation: if S feels disunity with O, there is some disunity going on, at least at the level of psychological integration. But the distinction is important to capture cases in which S is alienated but doesn't feel so, and when S's attitudes are inaccurate or fail to track independently true factual or normative considerations that apply to them.

[6] "Alienation," sect. 4.

[7] Marx is most explicit about the links between alienation and human nature in his *Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx talks about a "strife between existence and essence" (p. 84). He says that alienation arises in productive activity that features "self-estrangement" (p. 75), in which the worker "is estranging himself from himself" (p. 73). This activity "does not belong to [the worker's] essential being" (p. 74). This failure to be at one with oneself is sometimes presented as including a subjective experience in which the worker "does not feel content but unhappy" and "feels outside himself" (p. 74). But this experience does not seem to be a necessary condition for alienation.

activities that are freely chosen, self-conscious, creative, individually differentiated, sensuously sophisticated, and socially cooperative and beneficial. They face alienation when, and to the extent that the development and exercise of these capacities is frustrated. The paradigmatic case is alienated labor, which is productive activity in which workers:

(AL1) are dominated by others, and/or

(AL2) do not control (or even understand) the social process of production, its mechanisms, and results, and/or

(AL3) do not develop and exercise their creative powers and talents, and/or

(AL4) interact with others in ways that are not mutually supportive and cooperative, and/or

(AL5) do not count among the final aims of production the fulfilling of the needs of fellow human beings, and/or

(AL6) do not garner social appreciation or recognition.

According to Marx, wage workers are largely subject to the will of the capitalists that hire them. As owners of the means of production, capitalists have greater bargaining power, which they use to determine (much more so than workers do) the content and rhythm of production and the division of revenues resulting from the sale of what is produced. The activity of production is for the workers mostly of instrumental relevance (a means to get a salary to pay for subsistence and other consumption goods). It is not intrinsically valuable because it does not offer a medium to cultivate and deploy their abilities. The instrumentalizing attitude is also paramount across the human relationships shaping economic life.[8] Other people are relevant mostly as means for self-advancement. There is a tendency to give only in order to receive, and to give as little as possible to get as much as possible. Economic competition is pervasive and ruthless, and production is primarily geared to profit maximization, not to need satisfaction. In this context, one is mostly appreciated by how much one owns and by the power one has over others, not by the intrinsic significance of what one produces and by the contribution it makes to the well-being of others. A social structure pushing people to live in this way generates alienation for everyone, including the oppressors—all are at odds with their inner tendencies towards freedom and cooperative sociality.

2.3. *Descriptive and normative accounts of alienation.* Descriptive claims about alienation report that there is disunity between S and O. Normative claims go further, adding that some disunities are worthy of criticism. Normative accounts of alienation assume, or explicitly put forward, views about the positive value of some instances of unity, and about what the components, form, and justification of the unity should be.[9]

Some descriptive accounts also offer explanations of why the disunity S/O exists. For example, Marx argues that facts about the background circumstances C help explain why workers are at odds with themselves and others as they produce. Marx highlights three important features of such circumstances: the property relations regarding the control of productive forces, the orientation of production and consumption, and the level of technological development. There is alienation if the level of technological development is relatively low, the property relations are not egalitarian, and the orientation of production and consumption is predominantly instrumental and self-centered. In

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[8] A society in which persons only are relevant for others when they "become a means for" the latter's self-advancement is disparaged by Marx, and characterized as a terrain of "mutual swindling and plundering." *Manuscripts,* 101, 93.

[9] Some accounts of alienation (such as Leopold's) seem to build the normative dimension into the very definition, saying that there is alienation if there is separation between S of O when there should be unity. I think it is better to capture the point these accounts try to make by saying that some (but not all) descriptions of alienation refer to cases of separation when there was, or there is some tendency, for S and O to be together. This is different from saying, normatively, that S and O should be together. The "should" of expectation and prediction differs from the "should" of evaluation or obligation. The former are descriptive, the latter normative. Not every unity, however likely, is desirable.

these circumstances, many people spend much of their time in activities which do not afford them intrinsic satisfaction. In turn, alienation is reduced as technological development, coupled with more egalitarian relations of production and non-instrumental orientations, allow people to organize their production and consumption in ways that enable all to steer their own lives and flourish. Marx's contrast between a future socialist society and previous class-divided, and technologically less developed societies coincides with his contrast between overcoming and undergoing systematic alienation.

2.4. *Prudential and moral variants of normative accounts***.** Normative accounts may be of at least two kinds: prudential and moral. Alienation may be criticized on prudential terms by saying that a lack of unity between S and O is a strike against S's well-being. By contrast, moral criticisms say that the disunity involves wrongdoing, that S is treated by other agents (and perhaps even by S themselves) in ways that contravene duties which are morally justified. An important question is whether, and if so how, prudential and moral accounts of alienation are related—a topic I will address later in the paper.

There is controversy as to whether Marx has substantive views about ethics and justice, and I will not rehearse it here. He does make several normatively colored statements about alienation and other problems in capitalism, and I interpret them, for the purposes of this paper, as involving substantive prudential and moral ideas.[10] We can, in particular, identify the important proposal that activities displaying self-determination and self-realization are the positive flipside of self-alienation. There is *self-determination* when, and to the extent that agents choose, understand, and control their activities. And there is *self-realization* when, and to the extent that, in their activities, agents actualize themselves by cultivating and employing their various talents and cooperative skills, and externalize themselves by producing objects others appreciate.[11]

These ideas are significant prudentially, as they identify aspects of human well-being. They are also of moral relevance if a just society requires fostering people's access to the conditions of their well-being. Thus, self-determination and self-realization would be unleashed in a better (socialist) society. Thanks to extensive technological development and the rational organization of the economy, the "realm of necessity" and the corresponding indispensable but onerous toil to secure subsistence would be circumscribed, and everyone would reach also, and expand, a "realm of freedom" in which "the development of human powers as an end in itself" unfolds.[12] This realm of freedom would feature non-alienated labor. Labor can be "repulsive" when it is "*externally forced labor,*" and this is the case with "slave-labor, serf-labor, and wage-labor." But it can also be "attractive." It can be a medium for the individual's "self-realization" and "real freedom."[13] Marx depicts an advanced socialist society as one in which people honor the slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," and take non-alienated labor involving the

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[10] For example, Marx condemned capitalism as involving alienation, torment, exploitation, and domination of labor in *Capital I* (London: Penguin, 1990), 798-9. For a masterful critical survey, see Norman Geras, "The Controversy about Marx and Justice," *New Left Review* I/150 (1985), 47-85.

[11] This statement partly draws on Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 3; and Richard Schacht *Alienation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), ch. 3. Elster construes self-realization (including self-actualization and self-externalization) and autonomy as the positive ideals underlying the critique of alienation. Schacht characterizes Marx's view of human nature as focusing on capacities for activities involving individuality, sociality, and cultivated sensuousness. My definitions of "self-determination" and "self-realization" are stipulative. We could construe self-realization more broadly to include self-determination as a sub-dimension. But I think that using the terms as I propose is fruitful for identifying different kinds of alienation.

[12] Marx, *Capital III* (London: Penguin, 1991), 958-9.

[13] Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973), 611.

"all-round development of the individual" as a "prime want".[14] Marx indeed invokes the ideal of "the development of the rich individuality which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption",[15] and envisions a "higher form of society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle".[16]

2.5. *Dynamic patterns*. Claims about alienation often take a dynamic form, to illuminate temporally extended processes. These processes often are (but need not always be) cast in a positive normative light, as involving progress. A common pattern in Hegelian and Marxian discussions includes the stages of undifferentiated unity, differentiated disunity, and differentiated unity.[17] Thus, for Marx, primitive communism displays communal relations, but a lack of development of each person's individuality. Class-societies, and in particular capitalism, feature some assertion of individuality, but to the detriment of communal relationships. The future, developed communist society, would display both individuality and community. The second stage in this process includes individuals' alienation from others (and from themselves as social beings), but it has a progressive significance in that it ushers into the emergence of personal differentiation, which is to be retained (and further developed) in the final, fully non-alienated stage. This final stage is not a mere return to the initial one, as in the initial stage individuals are alienated from their own personality, but a richer form of sociality that involves greater, and more harmonious development of both individuality and community.

An important theme from Marx concerns the relation between the alienated agents and their material and social circumstances. When agents are alienated from themselves, there is the question of how they express their inner tendencies and the ideals linked to them. One possibility, which Marx takes to be common in religion, liberal politics, and capitalist economies, is to project the realization of their ideals onto some entities such as God,[18] the state or the political community,[19] and money or capital.[20] These entities are seen as embodying the ideals. In a mental act of sublimation, agents seek a substitute, indirect self-determination or self-realization by attaching themselves to those entities. This operation is indirect and a substitute, because it does not feature the agents directly enacting in themselves the fulfillment of the ideals they cherish. Marx favors, instead, a direct fulfillment of the ideals in people's daily lives. This, according to him, requires changing the material and social circumstances so as to make the fulfillment more feasible. So, for example, if agents cherish freedom and solidarity rather than hierarchy and cutthroat competition, then they would do well to change their economic systems to dissolve class structures, and to increase material production to make competition for scarce resources less pressing and nasty. The central theme in this discussion is that ideals tend to express themselves in some way or other—they must find a medium of expression because they are central to people's motivational profiles—and when they do not find direct expression in the life of the agents due to

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[14] Marx, "Critique of Gotha Program," in *Marx-Engels Reader,* 525-41, at p. 531. Pablo Gilabert, "The Socialist Principle 'From Each According To Their Abilities, To Each According To Their Needs'." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46 (2015), 197-225.

[15] *Grundrisse*, 325.

[16] *Capital I*, 739.

[17] G. A. Cohen, "The Dialectic of Labour in Marx," in Cohen, *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 183-208.

[18] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction," in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 53-65, at pp.53-4.

[19] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Marx-Engels Reader,* 26-52, at pp.32-46.

[20] Marx, *Manuscripts*, 101-5; *Capital I,* 163-77. On fetishism, see G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx Theory of History. A Defense*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ch. V.

hostile circumstances, the agents either change these circumstances to make them amenable to fulfilling the ideals in their daily lives, or, failing to do that, they construct a separate plane in which the ideals play out in substitute form.

An important, related point is that the dynamic duty to overcome alienation is for Marx a practical not merely a theoretical one. It is not a matter of simply concocting a different description of ourselves, but of changing the social and material circumstances that make alienated activity a widespread condition.[21]

3. Human flourishing and freedom

The foregoing, brief discussion of Marx was meant to provide a salient example of alienation critique. My objective now is to articulate some core normative features of this kind of critique and its relation to freedom. The next section addresses four objections to which it is vulnerable.

3.1. *The normative dimension of alienation.* Not all instances of alienation are bad or wrong. A person may be alienated in their relation to features of themselves which, although they endorse or cherish, they have reason not to so endorse or cherish. A despot who has been removed from their position of power may feel at a loss in their new life, noticing that they cannot lord it over others anymore. But the condition of domination is not one to be celebrated, and the persons moving away from it should not regret its end. In the remainder of this paper, I develop a *normative* rather than descriptive account of alienation (of the instances of "not at oneness" that are bad or wrong). To identify normatively problematic cases of alienation, prudential and moral considerations must be introduced. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 do that. My discussion will focus on self-alienation—i.e., on cases in which when S is at odds with O, O is some aspect of themselves.

3.2. *Human flourishing and the prudential critique of alienation.* A descriptive claim about self-alienation simply says that there is a lack of successful self-identification on the part of some agent (some deficit in their sense of positive identity). Normative claims add that what is lacking is a self-identification that is *appropriate*. I articulate these claims more specifically, by saying that alienated agents fail to be at one with themselves as self-determining and self-realizing persons. I thus argue for the presence of links between substantive values of self-identity, self-determination and self-realization (with all three being relevant for well-being as human flourishing).

So, to state this position in more detail, I suggest that alienation contrasts with *successful and appropriate self-identification as a form of human flourishing*. Here are the components of the ideal involved.

- *Human flourishing* consists in conditions in which human beings develop and exercise their valuable capacities in some activities. I take flourishing to be at least part of what constitutes people's well-being (of what has non-instrumental prudential value for them).
- The capacities engaged in human flourishing can be grouped into two categories. The first, concerning *self-determination*, involves the capacity for autonomy—understood in a broad sense, to range over people's determination of their acts, the motives on which they act, and the consequences of their acts.[22] The second category, which concerns *self-realization*, involves capacities regarding creativity, singular self-expression, social fellowship, knowledge, and pleasure –sensuous, aesthetic, etc.

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[21] *Manuscripts*, p. 89. Compare Marx's famous Thesis XI "[P]hilosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" ("Theses on Feuerbach," *Marx-Engels Reader*, 143-5, at p. 145).

[22] On various dimensions of autonomy see Catriona Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions of Autonomy. A Relational Analysis," in A. Veltman and M. Piper eds., *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15-41.

- Self-determination and self-realization are importantly different and related. In particular, self-determination should (and thus in fact might or might not) be used to seek to foster self-realization. When S determines themselves, they ask how they have reason to live, and "Pursuing self-realization" is a fitting answer.
- *Successful self-identification* refers to mental processes and states in which people achieve a satisfying, positive sense of their own predicament. Self-identification is *appropriate* when it tracks the development and exercise of one's valuable capacities—i.e. one's flourishing. The capacity for self-identification is itself arguably one of the valuable capacities people have reason to develop and exercise, and it is in this sense relevant to their well-being.[23] But it operates at a higher level than the capacities involved in self-determination and self-realization. Its roles are to ascertain whether the latter are indeed fulfilled, and to spur such fulfillment. (It is not redundant, however—a life involving successful and appropriate self-identification is better than another in which there is the same level of self-determination and self-realization but in which the person can but does not identify with these achievements).
- Appropriate self-identification does not require the total or complete development and exercise of one's capacities. Only valuable capacities are included in the relevant list. Furthermore, it is infeasible to fully develop and exercise all capacities.[24] To be plausible, the Marxian ideal of workers' self-determination and self-realization has to be understood with these limitations in mind. However, I take the ideal of appropriate self-identification to require the pursuit of some maximal overall schedule of self-determination and self-realization in which the agent achieves a combination of them that delivers as much overall flourishing as it is feasible and is not defeated by other, more weighty considerations, such as some moral constraints.[25] Of course, there can be several such schedules available to an agent to choose from (such as different work activities).

On this account, the truth conditions for self-alienation can be stated as follows. A person S is self-alienated if and only if, and to the extent that, (i) S has the capacity for self-identification; (ii) S has capacities regarding self-determination and self-realization; (iii) either S does not successfully self-identify or does self-identify successfully but not appropriately (due to actual deficiencies regarding the development and exercise of the capacities in (ii), or epistemic mistakes about noticing these deficiencies). A person facing working conditions including AL1-AL6 (see 2.2), for example, does not achieve self-determination and self-realization because they spend most of their waking hours doing what others dictate them to do, and what they do does not sufficiently allow them to cultivate and express their talents. This person will likely feel somewhat frustrated with this predicament, but even if they did not they should recognize that it is not fully satisfactory.

Some important caveats. The list of valuable capacities given above is not meant to be exhaustive. Furthermore, I do not assume that human flourishing is all that human well-being involves (although this could be argued for). Finally, I do not assume that self-identification must be present for there to be human flourishing. If some people lack the capacity for self-

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[23] It is important to people to address the question "Who am I?" The development and exercise of other capacities is to be pursued in such a way that it fits within an overall project of self. This project need not be fixed once and for all, and can be fairly complex, but it matters to the person that there is some such project (or perhaps projects), which features some level of complexity and coherence.

[24] Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx,* 43-4.

[25] Thus, I also differ from Elster's account in that I use an objective rather than a hedonistic account of prudential value, and highlight the issue of self-identification.

identification, but have other valuable capacities, they could have human flourishing regarding these other capacities even if they do not accompany it with self-identification. Self-alienation is a specific failure to achieve human flourishing.

The link to ameliorating action may not be readily apparent if the alienation that occurs is objective but not subjective, i.e. if S does not develop and exercise their valuable capacities but is not worried about it. An important dynamic pattern here (to be added to those mentioned in section 2.5) concerns personal (or collective) processes in which agents move from a state of self-identification in which they are satisfied with their condition to a state of strife in which they feel at odds with it, to culminate in a third, new state of re-identification in which satisfaction appears again but as a result of changes in the agent or/and their circumstances. Interestingly, the overcoming of states of alienation often pass through subjective alienation. This is because only in these situations agents engage in a reflective appraisal of their current configuration as being worse than some alternative one they envisage. In exclusively objective alienation, the conflict is a more indeterminate, and psychologically not yet potent one, between their current condition and a disjunction of possible alternative paths that would fulfill the relevant normative criteria. Practically, the path from objective alienation to its overcoming often passes through processes in which subjective alienation arises and is processed.

3.3. *Freedom and the moral critique of alienation.* The moral appraisal of alienation and its opposites, including self-determination and self-realization, can be discussed in terms of the idea of positive freedom.

Non-alienation may be characterized as a *capability* to live in certain ways or as the *functionings* resulting from the *exercise* of this capability.[26] Agents avoid alienation on the first characterization to the extent that it is feasible for them to flourish—i.e. to the extent that they would engage in activities featuring self-determination and self-realization, and achieve successful self-identification related to that engagement, if they tried to (and they can so try). In contrast, as an exercise notion, non-alienation refers to a condition in which agents successfully pursue the forms of life they have capabilities for. The more they choose this pursuit, and the more they succeed, the more they enjoy a non-alienated condition.

As we saw, non-alienation may feature as a prudential ideal of the good life. But it can also feature in a moral ideal regarding right conduct. In the latter case, the focus is on what duties people have, on what forms of treatment they owe each other (and perhaps also themselves). A specific type of moral requirements concerns *social justice*, and states the rights people have against each other in their social life. Non-alienation is indeed significant in both normative dimensions. I may have prudential reason to determine the conditions of my own life, and to shape it so that I achieve self-realization. But I may also have reason to do my part in securing that everyone has the capability to do these things. Some of these reasons may correlate with rights implemented in the institutional structure of a political and economic system.

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[26] I follow here the "capability approach". A person's functionings are certain ways of being and doing. A person's capabilities are their ability to engage in such functionings. Capabilities are a form of substantive or real freedom. Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 231–4; Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 20–5. As a normative perspective, the capability approach focuses on capabilities and functionings agents have reason to value. As the main focus for social justice, Nussbaum helpfully suggest the idea of "combined capabilities," which are made up of developed internal capacities and surrounding material and social conditions enabling their exercise. The ideas of "real freedom" or "effective freedom" are common amongst socialists. Samuel Arnold, "Socialism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016) sect. 6.

The two dimensions can be combined in substantive views of justice. The prudential value of non-alienation can inform part of the metric (or the currency) for the articulation of the content of moral requirements. Thus, a conception of justice could say that we have duties not to deprive, and also to further, each person's prospects for a non-alienated life by securing that real opportunities to work in self-determining and self-realizing ways are available to them in the economic system. Given the critical importance of self-determination—both as a prudential and as a moral value—it is likely that the best view of justice will predominantly focus on requiring the generation of capabilities to enjoy flouirshing lives rather than final outcomes in which those lives are lived. It should be up to each agent to exercise their capabilities—to decide whether, and how, they shape the specific contents of their lives. What is morally obligatory is to make sure (to the extent that is feasible and reasonable to demand) that each is given real opportunities to do so.

The ideals of self-identification, self-determination, and self-realization can be stated as favoring certain forms of *positive freedom*. As I see it, a positive freedom to x can indeed be defined as the power or capability to x. Importantly, negative freedom (as absence of interference by others in one's choices and acts) might contribute to, but does not exhaust the conditions of overall positive freedom. Interference by others may depress your capability set by removing options, or by hampering your pursuit of some existing options. But your capability set may be limited by other facts—such as your psychological difficulties and a lack of external resources—which others could ameliorate but choose not to. This is why the fostering of self-identification, self-determination, and self-realization would only be fully envisioned in an ideal that yields both negative duties to refrain from harmful interference and positive duties to provide help. I think that the following ideal fits the bill:

> *Solidaristic Empowerment*: We should support people in their pursuit of a flourishing life by fulfilling both negative duties not to destroy or block their valuable human capacities and positive duties to protect and facilitate their development and exercise.

Solidaristic Empowerment requires negative freedom, but only as part of the broader call for supporting the positive freedom of people to shape and pursue life prospects which are valuable.[27]

An important question regarding positive and negative freedom is whether some forms of negative freedom may justifiably be limited to increase positive freedom. For example, may the fostering of capabilities for self-determination and self-realization justify interference with some choices and acts regarding the control and use of external resources such as productive assets? On the account I propose here, the answer is Yes.[28] Some claims regarding negative freedom can be defeated, or constrained, when this is necessary or highly important for securing appropriate levels of positive freedom for all. This, at any rate, is what the ideal of Solidaristic Empowerment that I propose suggests. This ideal also illuminates the Marxian picture discussed in section 2. Marx's critique of capitalism, and his view of socialism, are often couched by reference to freedom. Capitalism is seen as involving lack of opportunities for workers to develop and exercise their capacities in spontaneous activities which are an end in itself (rather than a mere means to gain subsistence) and as featuring the domination of workers by capitalists at the workplace and in other social spheres. By contrast, the future socialist society of "freely associated producers" is depicted as lifting these constraints. Socialism would give everyone (and not only, as in capitalism, a ruling

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[27] The value of negative freedom is parasitic on the value of positive freedom. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 409-10.

[28] Property rights over external resources also restrict the negative liberty of people who do not own them (e.g. impoverished workers may be interfered with if they try to forage in the land a landlord owns). G. A. Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)*,* chapters 7-8.

minority) access to "real freedom" through effective opportunities for self-realization and through novel forms of organization of production set on workers' own terms rather than on the dictates imposed by a class that oppresses and exploits them. This picture includes not only limits to interference but also the social empowerment of each individual.[29]

The moral critique of alienation targets forms of alienation that involve failure to honor Solidaristic Empowerment. These are cases of morally problematic lack of freedom (or unfreedom) in which we can observe:

> (PLF1) obstacles to positive freedom (*power or capability deficit condition*),
> (PLF2) which are feasible to remove or reduce through human action and social institutions (*feasibility of change condition*),
> (PLF3) and which some agents have reason to so remove or reduce (*desirability of change condition*).

Two comments on this characterization. Notice, first, that in (PLF1) and (PLF2), the obstacles to power or capability need not be, or result from, coercive or other forms of intentional action by others. They could be the unintended consequence of impersonal factors, such as natural processes, or the aggregation of many agents' acts, or institutions. What is crucial is that the obstacles can be changed socially. Second, in (PLF2) and (PLF3), the removal or reduction of obstacles may involve positive obligations besides negative ones. The obstacle to capability an agent suffers— their lack of empowerment—may result from the wrongful imposition of it by other agents, or have other causes but remain in place because other agents wrongfully refrain from acting to remove them when they could do so at reasonable cost. This view is controversial, of course (and I return to it in sect. 4). But the affirmation of positive duties is indeed a crucial component of a solidaristic perspective. It is common to say that lack of freedom is a moral or political issue only when it reflects a social problem rather than merely being a case of inability.[30] On the account presented here, disempowerment is a social problem not only if the social context displays some agents reducing the power of others, but also when it displays some agents failing to help others keep or develop their power. Additionally, the acts by other agents generating the change may be individual or collective, be punctual or involve an extended process, and be direct or indirect (through the change of institutions, for example).

4. Dignity

I will now address four objections that are commonly directed at the critique of alienation. They concern the risks of an essentialist view, a mishandling of the distinction between the good and the right, the risk of paternalistic impositions, and the significance of democratic authorization. Responding to these objections is important in its own right, and also enables us to develop further the account of the critique of alienation provided so far.

4.1. *The dignitarian approach.* To answer the objections, I suggest that we develop the critique of alienation in terms of the *Dignitarian Approach*, according to which:

> We have reason to organize social life in such a way that we respond appropriately to the valuable features of individual human beings that give rise to their dignity.

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[29] "[O]nly in the community … is personal freedom possible." Marx, *German Ideology,* in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 146-200, at p. 197.

[30] A common worry about positive freedom accounts is that they fail to distinguish between unfreedom and mere inability: the former, unlike the latter, entails the presence of normatively problematic social constraints. For discussion, see Andreas Schmidt, "Abilities and the Sources of Unfreedom," *Ethics* 127 (2016), 179-207.

I present this approach in detail elsewhere, but the main points are the following.[31] *Dignity* is at the most fundamental level a non-conventional, normative status of persons such that certain forms of respect and concern are owed to them. *Dignitarian norms* specify the appropriate treatment—the forms of respect and concern—that responding to such *status-dignity* requires. When people are treated in accordance to these norms, they enjoy *condition-dignity*. Now, people have status-dignity because of certain valuable capacities, which constitute *the basis of dignity*. The ideal of Solidaristic Empowerment, discussed above, can be used to state dignitarian norms—our various duties not to undermine, and positive duties to facilitate, people's pursuit of a flourishing life in which they develop and exercise the valuable capacities at the basis of their dignity. The Dignitarian Approach, via Solidaristic Empowerment, thus requires support for positive freedom.

People are alienated to the extent that they fail to be at one with themselves in their life activities. As we saw, a plausible way to explain alienation is to show that it involves deficits in people's ability to develop and exercise their capacities in activities featuring self-determination and self-realization. When the relevant capacities are amongst the valuable capacities that give rise to status-dignity, and their development and exercise can be supported by others at reasonable cost, Solidaristic Empowerment calls for such a support, and its neglect wrongfully contributes to alienation.[32] An important case of alienation is the predicament of workers in capitalist societies. The critical point here is that the capitalist economy is organized in such a way that in it (foreseeably and avoidably) workers are insufficiently empowered to develop and exercise valuable capacities regarding self-management, creativity, knowledge, cooperation, and socially beneficial contribution, among others. Accounts of freedom only focused on non-interference fail to fully capture what is wrong with the alienation of labor. Alienation involves additional deficits of positive freedom—a hampering of agents' power to live flourishing lives in which they develop and exercise their valuable capacities. Since the dignitarian and solidaristic perspective outlined in this paper is well-positioned to explain concerns about positive freedom, it can also provide a normative basis for the critique of the alienation of workers in capitalism. According to Marx, for example, to move beyond the predicament in which workers are unable to realize their potential, radical changes are needed. It is not enough, for example, to raise their wages. This "would not conquer either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity."[33] Overcoming workers' alienation would only be achieved in a new society that lifts the constraints on positive freedom imposed by material scarcity and class division. This society would unleash self-determination and self-realization in production.[34]

4.2. *Problematic essentialism?* The Dignitarian Approach provides a unified and powerful basis to answer the four typical worries about normative engagement with the topic of alienation. The first objection runs as follows. We characterized alienation as a deficit of positive freedom. More specifically, we discussed deficits in people's self-identification regarding their self-determination and self-realization. Now, this discussion seemed to presuppose the view that there is a human

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[31] Pablo Gilabert, "Kantian Dignity and Marxian Socialism," *Kantian Review* 22 (2017), 553-77; *Human Dignity and Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); "Dignity at Work," in G. Collins, H. Lester, V. Mantouvalou eds., *Philosophical Foundations of Labour Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 68-86. One purpose of this paper is to develop the Dignitarian Approach further. I do not claim, however, that no other normative framework could be similarly useful to account for alienation and freedom.

[32] Situations like this, in which applying dignitarian norms is both feasible and called for, are part of what I call the *circumstances of dignity*.

[33] *Manuscripts*, 80.

[34] It would also feature a more sophisticated and appreciative sensibility and enjoyment in consumption. Ibid., e.g., 87-9.

essence or nature, a certain set of invariant capacities that people have. But views of freedom (and alienation) tied to the power to develop and exercise these capacities is problematic, for three reasons. (a) First, it is not clear that there is a human essence. If we look hard at the facts, what we encounter is great variation (biological, historical, and individual). For any allegedly universal feature, there are human beings who don't exhibit it. (b) Even if there were an essence, it would be explanatorily inert. The features would be too general to account for important cases of freedom or alienation. (c) Finally, essentialist views threaten the "interpretive sovereignty" of reflective agents. For example, they push them to fit substantive, objective molds of well-being which may not be appropriate for them. It would be better to deploy a procedural, formalist account of positive freedom (and self-alienation) which focuses not on *what* agents identify themselves with, but on *how* they do so.[35]

These worries can be answered. Regarding (a), notice first that a picture of human nature can be quite broad and flexible. It can state natural features of human beings which allow for diverse specific developments. We can distinguish, within the space of capacities and needs, between more or less abstract and specific instances. A general capacity, and need, for creative production, for example, can be unfolded in different ways in different contexts by different people. One can produce different objects, for different audiences, in different settings. The Marxian view precisely affirms this variation, demanding opportunities for individuals to chart their own singular projects of self-actualization and self-externalization. Successful appropriate self-identification does not entail fixation. Since agents are dynamic in the development and exercise of their capacities, they are dynamic in their self-identification. Continuity of self is consistent with diversity of its configurations. So long as change in configuration involves self-determination and self-realization, it need not carry alienation. Most importantly, however (and quite independently of Marx's views), the Dignitarian Approach to freedom does not require believing that there is a uniform human nature or essence. We can do without the idea of human nature and just rely on a disjunctive list of valuable capacities at the basis of dignity. People have status-dignity whenever they have any of the capacities in the list, and they enjoy condition-dignity when these capacities are given appropriate responses. What the freedom of a person S requires is that S be capable to develop and exercise the valuable capacities that *S* has, to whatever extent this is feasible and reasonable (whether these capacities are shared with every other human person or not).[36]

Turning to (b), it is worth noting that even if there is no human essence, being able to refer to relatively general (if not strictly universal) valuable features of human beings may be desirable. This reference allows us to gain distance from existing practices and conventions, and to criticize them as unreasonable because of failing to properly respond to something that is normatively more basic and important. Second, this reference helps formulate significant norms of solidaristic empowerment with expansive scope, such as human rights.[37] It also helps form judgments about

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[35] These worries are raised in Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), e.g., 27-35.

[36] This allows us to address another worry about essentialism: (d) the risk of committing the naturalistic fallacy—the invalid inference from judgements about what people are like to judgments about what people should be like. Saying that alienation is normatively problematic because it features deficits of development or exercise of capacities that people have would involve the fallacy. But the Dignitarian Approach avoids it. It does not rely only on descriptive reports about existing capacities. It also deploys evaluative judgments to identify *valuable* capacities.

[37] Even if he is right that Marx (unlike Hegel) paid insufficient attention to associative forms of self-identification, Cohen overshoots the mark when he decries Marx's endorsement of "Enlightenment universalism." See Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History,* 346-55. Human identity can and should exist alongside, and be seen as normatively constraining, particular associative identities. Think about the moral and political culture of human rights. When someone in Canada campaigns against the sweatshop conditions in Bangladesh's factories, or against the mistreatment

historical change as involving progress or retrogression. Third, reference to relatively general features (valuable and not) helps us to develop historical explanations. We can identify relatively constant factors that operate in different ways in different contexts, to produce certain social outcomes. Perhaps the capacities and needs regarding non-alienated labor are an example of this. They may be the basis of robust *tendencies*. Fourth, these tendencies may even be relevant politically, in the present, to understand the conditions of feasibility of proposals for social change promoting their expression. The possibility of, and the hopes in, the critique of alienation lie in the fact that it seizes and unleashes valuable capacities and tendencies that seem deep and widespread. The dignitarian approach to human flourishing and solidaristic empowerment, and empirical research tracking the incidence of the features it zeroes in, can capture these points without the problems of essentialism.

Finally, regarding (c), I have three replies. The first is to notice that the objection seems to presuppose an essentialism of sorts when it invokes the interpretive sovereignty of reflective agents. If the criterion of successful and appropriate self-identification is reflective acceptance by that agent, then the existence of such an agent, and the value of their capacities of self-assessment, are assumed. Second, a merely formal criterion of appropriate self-identification—if it aims at providing a test that is determinative rather than merely evidentiary or epistemic—faces a version of the traditional Euthyphro question: Is a configuration of myself good (or right) because I endorse it, or do I (or should I) endorse it because it is good (or right)? The reflective agent either relies on reasons for their judgment or they do not. If they do not, then their verdict is arbitrary and has no authority. If they do, then the reasons provide an external, substantive, and objective standard whose normativity is not reducible to the agent's attitudes. The approach faces the familiar problems of desire-satisfaction theories of the good and cultural relativist and conventionalist theories of the right. The problems are not dissolved by saying that agents' endorsement should be informed and reasoned—as the significance of these qualifications is in part precisely to alert the reflective agents to reasons they do not themselves construct.[38]

Third, and most importantly, the Dignitarian Approach can recognize the importance of the reflective agent's stance while avoiding both problematic forms of essentialism and a relapse into arbitrariness or subjectivism. The reflective agent has crucial epistemic and constructive roles (as well as decisional ones—see 4.4 below) even if the normative assessments they engage in track substantive, objective reasons. So, S may come to reject a configuration of themselves as F and envision and pursue an alternative one as G. Both F and G may be social or personal constructions, but their assessment by S relies in part on the search and recognition of reasons which are not themselves constructed. The latter can involve appropriate responses of concern and respect for the valuable capacities at the basis of the dignity of S (or other persons). Thus, a worker may quit a job in a standard capitalist firm and join a cooperative, or advocate for societal opportunities for this kind of change. In justification, the worker can invoke the importance of being able to enjoy

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of refugees in the United States, they can meaningfully criticize the fact that *fellow human beings* are unduly subject to hardship. They do not need to qualify this by reference to any other kind of fellowship. The cosmopolitan solidarity articulated by Enlightened universalism is a moral achievement worth holding on to, even if it has to be reformulated to take social embodiment seriously. Acknowledging good critical points made by Hegel should not make us forget other good points made by Kant.

[38] It could be objected that this "qualified subjectivism" (Jaeggi's phrase) merely helps agents gather information about how to implement their ground projects. But the latter need themselves to be justified. It is better to endorse a qualified objectivism instead, admitting external dignitarian reasons while leaving plenty of flexibility for the agent to chart projects honoring them in chosen ways.

self-determination and self-realization at work, and explain that, in the relevant circumstances, cooperatives do better than standard capitalist firms in catering for these desiderata.

4.3. *Gap between the good and the right?* Recall the points about problematic instances of lack of freedom (PLF1-PLF3) in section 3.3. A worry here is that there is a gap between what is desirable in the sense of being good and what is desirable in the sense of being a matter of right. When we argue for the claim that people are entitled to opportunities for self-determined and self-realizing work by saying that they have an interest in accessing working activities with those features, a critic may say that there is a logical gap between being interested in something and having a right to it. How do we traverse this gap?

The Dignitarian Approach helps by identifying interests with deontic standing. If the object of the relevant interests includes the development and exercise of certain valuable capacities, and these capacities are in the basis of dignity, then the support regarding the interests is potentially a fitting response to the status-dignity of the person who has them. If this response is feasible and imposes no unreasonable costs on the responder, then it may constitute a pro tanto duty correlated with a pro tanto right.[39] We are not taking others' dignity seriously if we deny that we have negative duties to avoid obstructing, and positive duties to facilitate, their self-determination and self-realization. More specifically, we can say that when conditions of alienation (such as AL1-AL6, listed in 2.2) set back valuable capacities which are in the basis of dignity, people have interests in the development and exercise of these capacities which call for (reasonable, feasible) ameliorative action offering them real opportunities to avoid their alienation. The response envisaged would deliver the condition-dignity which the condition of alienation prevents and status-dignity calls for.[40]

4.4. *Paternalistic imposition?* Recall that one of the dynamic patterns in the critique of alienation consists in sequences involving initial identification, des-identification, and re-identification. What we find in the second, critical stage, is a situation in which, in circumstances C, S experiences a conflict between their ideal views of themselves as A and their actual condition as B. Emancipation here calls for S to move from realizing B to realizing A (perhaps by changing C to make this realization more feasible). Now, a typical liberal worry is that an account of freedom that calls for socially supporting this change in people's condition would unduly violate their liberty to live as they choose. It would involve a paternalistic circumventing of their will for their own good. But the Dignitarian Approach is not unduly paternalistic. It primarily requires opportunities for, rather than conditions of, non-alienation, and it sees agents as protagonists of their own amelioration.

In fact, a defense of the requirement that there be real opportunities for activities featuring self-determination and self-realization could be mounted within a broadly liberal egalitarian framework. The two principles of freedom and equality can be marshaled to do this. To have

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[39] "Reasonable costs" is an umbrella expression to be unpacked by reference to whatever would be agents' fair share (barring emergencies, which may be more demanding) in a just scheme of social life that implements the dignitarian norms in the relevant context (including but also going beyond, appropriate labor conditions). The specifics of such a scheme are important to settle, but lie beyond the focus of this paper. See 4.6 below.

[40] The Dignitarian Approach thus orients the search for the metric of specific freedoms that are both prudentially significant and claimable as rights. By the same token, it helps avoid a sharp contrast between a "moral," deontological approach to alienation focused on justice and rights and an "ethical" one focused on recommendations for a good life. On this contrast (and a critique of Jaeggi's account for missing it), see Rainer Forst "Noumenal Alienation: Rousseau, Kant, and Marx on the Dialectics of Self-Determination," *Kantian Review* 22 (2017), 523-51. On my brand of deontology (dignitarianism) substantive considerations of access to self-realization are added to procedural considerations of self-determination, and are morally significant. The distinction between prudential and moral normativity is important, but so is their connection.

enough content, such principles need to specify a metric, certain goods, which they range over. They need this to answer the questions "Freedom from what to do or be what?" and "Equality of access to what?" The defender of non-alienated labor can say that people should be free from undue interference in their pursuit of self-determination and self-realization at work, that this pursuit should be one they have the power, or capability, to fulfill, and that effective opportunity to engage in it should be made available for all on equal footing.[41]

This move is significantly strengthened by linking non-alienation to dignity. This is so because the idea of human dignity can be shown to give rise *both* to the general principles of freedom and equality *and* the goods of non-alienation. People are to be treated as equals, and afforded freedom from interference and positive freedom to pursue their projects, because they have status-dignity. Now, since people have this status-dignity because of their valuable capacities—the ones forming the basis of dignity—the freedom and equality owed to them should favor opportunities for developing and exercising these capacities. Activities featuring self-determination and self-realization at work are significant examples of such opportunities. They should, therefore, be targets for the implementation of liberal egalitarian principles.

But who gets to say what opportunities should be made available? The answer is: In a way, nobody, and in another way, everybody. Nobody, because our interests and rights are not the decision of anyone. Everybody, because nobody has an epistemic crystal ball to grasp them and we should be the authors of our lives and the framers of our institutions. We all can form beliefs about our interests and rights, revise them in critical debate, and devise successive accounts which, we hope, improve over time, as they survive scrutiny. Self-determination has pride of place within the Dignitarian Approach. We, together or separately as appropriate, have to figure out what positive freedoms we shall support and exercise.

4.5. *The two-level justification objection.* An advocate for institutions and practices that support non-alienation faces another criticism that builds on the significance of political, democratic freedom. We can distinguish between two levels of social activity. There is a first, ground level in which people interact in their daily lives such as when they transact in the market and produce at the workplace. And there is a second, higher level in which people decide what forms of first-level activities to permit, require, or facilitate. A clear example of second level activity would be the political process. Now, the objection is that alienated conditions at the first level would not be problematic if they are authorized in appropriate ways at the second level. If people, as citizens in a fair democratic process, decide to permit alienating activities in economic life, and to not facilitate robust alternatives to them (via, for example, support for cooperatives and the social economy sector or a high universal basic income enabling experimentation with novel forms of work), then there is no injustice taking place. Concerns about alienation thus have at most a personal significance. They do not raise to the height of concerns about social injustice.

In response, consider, first, that although procedural political legitimacy plays an important role in social justice, it does not exhaust the terrain. Norms that are endorsed democratically can still

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[41] It could be objected that Solidaristic Empowerment is still unduly hostile to individual negative liberty because it requires everyone to fund positive freedoms for all, such as options of non-alienated work, even if they do not themselves want them. There are common replies to this kind of worry. People's inabilities regarding self-realization may themselves involve restrictions to their negative liberty imposed by property conventions, and there could be more overall negative liberty without them (see note 28). The negative liberties infringed upon (e.g. to not be taxed to fund options of non-alienated labor) might be less weighty than the positive liberties enabled. The positive freedoms fostered may be authorized through practices of political democratic freedom (within a constitutional framework enshrining basic individual liberties), and important for enhancing robust citizenship (e.g. via the linkage between practices of self-determination at work and in politics—see 4.5).

be unjust. The question "Is this norm just?" is not settled by an answer to the question "Who (and how) decides whether this norm is enacted?" Norms requiring access to opportunities for self-determination and self-realization in economic life may be substantively correct even if citizens choose not to adopt them. Citizens might have made a mistake, which they should correct in future iterations of their political action.

Second, if widespread, alienation in economic life may undermine the quality of the democratic process which the objection invokes. What happens at the first level may affect what happens at the second in a way that subverts the latter's normative status. This is partly an empirical issue, but a hypothesis worth taking seriously is that when people go about their lives in a way that is systematically alienated, they may fail to effectively enjoy political equality. Apathy, ignorance, egotistic self-centeredness or submissiveness, and other attitudes, which people develop in their economic life, may stunt the development of attitudes of critical reflection, concern for others, and readiness to resolutely participate to address issues of general significance which seem crucial for a healthy democratic process.[42]

Third, and relatedly, we should distinguish between incidents of alienation at the first level that are occasional and incidents that are widespread. The former might not pose a serious problem, while the latter clearly do. The two-levels objection is often pressed by using examples such as competitive games. Such games may engage problematic behavioral patterns and attitudes such as greed and aggression that are prima facie worrisome. But we could authorize them as occasional activities (while also constraining them through appropriate rules). We could even say that it is a good thing to have such games so that people discharge in them some nasty drives they would otherwise express in less contained, and in more dangerous, forms. But when a whole economy displays worrisome behavioral patterns in a systematic way, then the situation is quite different. The intrinsic and instrumental harms generated by an economy suffused with alienation are not easily reduced to occasional incidents. They are instead pervasive features of people's lives, of the many hours they spend working, five days a week. The moral significance of the harms is thus heightened and the absence of real opportunities to avoid them a clear problem of social justice.

Finally, it is important to notice that the case of work is special, in that societies systematically push people to work (on pain of failure to meet urgent needs of subsistence and social recognition), and it is unlikely that most of them will access enough self-realization outside of it. By creating opportunities for non-alienated work, Solidaristic Empowerment does not so much force people to be free as prevent their being forced to be unfree.

4.6. *Further issues*. I have responded to four central worries about alienation critique. My main purpose has been to use the Dignitarian Approach to identify and defend a core normative structure for this critique. But, of course, other important concerns should be addressed to develop the account more fully. Let me briefly mention some of them, with some indications about how they could be handled. The objective is not to settle them, but to offer some hypothesis for future discussion.

Solidaristic Empowerment enjoins us to support people's positive freedom to engage in non-alienated activities. Our negative and positive duties, I said, are to do what is reasonably feasible to respond to people's status-dignity as they face alienating predicaments. The reference to what is "reasonably feasible" is an umbrella expression which must be unpacked to specify more determinate dignitarian norms that state who owes what to whom in the relevant circumstances under examination. These norms would take the support for non-alienated activity as a pro tanto

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[42] On the relation between attitudes at work and in broader political action, see Roberto Fraga, Lisa Herzog, Christian Neuhauser, "Workplace Democracy—The Recent Debate," *Philosophy Compass*: forthcoming.

consideration which has to be balanced against other considerations to reach all things considered judgments about what we owe to each other. This exercise would require, for example, that we say more about the division of labor, if any, between social institutions and individual and collective agents. I take dignity to require duties for both. Two societies with the same institutions, but in which agents make different choices about whether to support the dignity of others, are not equally just. But the precise scheme for the allocation of responsibilities certainly requires careful examination.

We will also want to determine distributive issues about the scores for people's freedom to avoid alienation. For example, should we accept a sufficientarian or some kind of egalitarian function? I think that dignity generates a presumption for the highest equal distribution that is reasonably feasible. But a sufficientarian floor of condition-dignity may be identified as an important specification of Solidaristic Empowerment as well. Of particular importance would be to support the kinds of self-identification that allow people to gain a robust sense of self-esteem and self-respect in their social life—which they normally need to pursue their flourishing in a confident manner.[43] Other important distributive issues concern the extent of duties to contribute to the flourishing of others, especially in the face of (likely) facts of partial compliance and unequal capacities, and given the ethical importance of a personal prerogative to give special weight to one's own projects and relationships. It might be unfair, for example, to demand that we take repeated steps to help others flourish when they consistently can but choose not to reciprocate. If resources are scarce, I think that it would be wrong of me to ask for equal shares in the proceedings of social cooperation when I choose to contribute less than you do. Above some sufficiency threshold of the kind mentioned above, some requirement of reciprocity or responsibility regarding contribution seem appropriate, and qualify the egalitarianism envisaged. This reciprocity, however, should itself be fair, by tracking not simply outputs of production but ratios of effort to given capacity. This, I think, is part of the spirit of the slogan "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." Other things being equal, if you put more effort into our shared cooperative venture than I do, then it seems that I am taking your needs less seriously than you are taking mine. This would be so even if the amount of output we produced is the same. If I had done my best as you did, we would have had more to share.

Some important issues regarding trade-offs would also have to be explored.[44] I have focused on successful and appropriate self-identification at work as an important need. But I do not deny that non-alienation is significant in other activities. Agents may reasonably choose to enact self-determination and self-realization in the latter, even if that costs them some alienation in the former. But we should be careful. Consider the view that the remedy for alienated labor is not so much to *improve* work, but to *contain* it, that the main demand should be to shorten the working day. I agree that self-determination and self-realization can be achieved outside of work also. However, for most people in our current societies, this is not enough. Most people are pushed to work on pain of losing access to subsistence and social respect, and they will not get enough access to self-determination and self-realization in their daily activities unless options of non-alienated work are available. I also agree that we can reduce the amount of necessary but unsavory work.

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[43] I owe this point to Peter Dietsch. I also thank Nicholas Vrousalis for discussion on the importance of highlighting self-identification in the specification of the focus of Solidaristic Empowerment concerning alienation. Another important issue is the metric of distribution. If what is crucial is catering to needs, then equal (or sufficientarian) distribution of resources may not be the key notion: what is key is to secure the power to meet the relevant needs given diverse conditions, which may justify different bundles of resources for different people. In the case of labor, for example, power to flourish may require specific working arrangements for people with some disabilities.

[44] I thank Sam Arnold for discussion and suggestions regarding the critical points that follow in this section.

We can also distributive it more fairly. However, we should be skeptical about the prospects of reduction of working time in capitalism. Workers in advanced capitalist societies work fewer hours than workers in the 19th century, but only after much political struggle by trade unions, socialist parties, and other progressive organizations. And the reduction has slowed or stagnated in the last 50 years even though productivity has skyrocketed.[45] Capitalism has displayed a strong bias against reducing the working day—the tendency is instead to use productivity gains to increase output to undersell competitors.[46] Finally, there is the issue of how to define "work." We may do well to use a broad notion of work (as intentional activity to produce goods and services that meet needs or desires) to include some activities often considered not to be work, such as homemaking and community service. The latter are also potential arenas of non-alienated productive activity.

Reasonable trade-offs could arise not only within the space of non-alienation (between different activities), but also between non-alienated activity and other values. Some might prefer a job that scores lower in terms of avoiding alienation if that gives them more income to pursue other goods, such as leisure and consumption. Such trade-offs may indeed be reasonable. But, again, we should handle claims about them carefully. Consider the view that, given the efficiency of alienated work, there may be a trade-off between (a) income and wealth and (b) meaningful work. Why not prioritize the former? Money is an all-purpose good allowing multiple desirable activities. Notice, however, that the need for the alleged trade-offs may be spurious. There is some empirical evidence that more self-realization and self-determination at work increases productivity. Workers identifying themselves with a job they help control and in which they unfold their talents may be able to generate more output.[47] So, it is important to show that the trade-offs are indeed unavoidable. Second, even when they are necessary, it is important that their distribution is fairly shared among people, rather than concentrated in some vulnerable groups. Third, it is also important to consider that beyond certain levels of income, and assuming that working hours remain long, having more money is likely to add less to the worker's well-being than meaningful work. Finally, many forms of meaningful activity outside of work do not require a lot of money. Good cultivation of friendship, for example, is not simply a function of how much we money spend on it.

My references to Marx's stark contrasts between capitalism and socialism may give the impression that I endorse them without qualifications. But consider, for example, the challenges that socialism is not a necessary condition for self-determination and self-realization at work because non-alienated work is feasible in capitalism (especially with a welfare state, or with a high universal basic income). It is also not clear that socialism is a sufficient condition, as some unsavory, alienated work will likely be needed even in socialism. I do not mean to settle these issues in this paper. My focus has been on identifying some core normative concepts and principles. The reference to Marx's critique of capitalism and advocacy for socialism is mostly illustrative. Surely comparing feasible forms of capitalism and socialism would require a careful argument that lies beyond this paper's scope.[48] Still, consider some responses. Regarding necessary conditions, I do not deny that achievements in self-determination and self-realization are feasible under capitalism, for some people. But the main question should be: Does capitalism

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[45] See data in CORE, *The Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Unit 3. See: https://core-econ.org/the-economy/book/text/03.html#subheadline.

[46] Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, ch. XI.

[47] Coutrot, *Libérer le Travail*, Part III.

[48] For surveys of recent discussions on feasible socialist proposals, see Giacomo Corneo, *Is Capitalism Obsolete?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Pablo Gilabert and Martin O'Neill, "Socialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019), section 4.

give everyone the highest equal chances to avoid alienation that are technically feasible and reasonably implementable? The answer may very well be No. Turning to sufficient conditions, I do not deny that some unsavory work will have to be done in a feasible socialist economy. But it would at least display more self-determination if it is scheduled democratically (both at the macro-societal level and within the organization of the workplace). And regarding self-realization, it would likely also be more limited in terms of working hours involved. That is the point of talking about reducing the "realm of necessity" (rather than eliminating it) while expanding the "realm of freedom" (rather than making it saturate the space of work). But these are only promissory remarks. The issues are indeed complex and require detailed separate treatment. Socialist transformation may also involve long processes with uncertain feasibility prospects, which leads me to the last reflection in this paper.

4.7. *Self-emancipation and the critique of alienated self-determination and self-realization.* As pointed out before (sect. 2.5), we encounter often a pattern in which, in circumstances C, an agent S undergoes a conflict between their ideal views of themselves as A and their actual condition as B, and in the face of this conflict they either accept C but re-describe their predicament as B under a more desirable light which captures some of their concerns as A or, more insidiously, they redefine A to make it fit B, or, instead, they seek to change C so as to actually refashion their condition as B (turning it into another that really fits their commitments as A). Now, the failure to experience subjective alienation in a situation where there is objective alienation is one of the first issues that critical reflection and debate should address. The critic sometimes has the role of helping people (themselves or others) to come to experience subjective alienation, as a step in their becoming active agents in their amelioration (see sect. 3.2). This dynamic process involves an act of *des-identification* with respect to conditions that are objectively alienating (and thus the generation of a moment of subjective alienation), and an act of *re-identification* with respect to prospective conditions which are objectively not, or are less alienating. The process generates a project whose fulfillment would yield an appropriate self-identification.

This critical stance is relevant in contexts in which there is truncated self-determination and self-realization. For example, recent transformations in capitalist firms feature opportunities for workers to take some initiative in the design of productive projects, and some horizontal cooperation with others in teams. But these changes do not dissolve capitalist class structure (owners of capital remain the decisive power), do not include all workers, and operate in conjunction with increased precariousness and uncertainty regarding job tenure and social benefits.[49] What we encounter here is cases of alienated self-determination and self-realization which merit criticism. But we also find the incipient expression of valuable ideals and tendencies. Critical, self-emancipatory reflection should notice this tension, and envision the more complete and decisive expression of the valuable ideals beyond their truncated satisfaction. Practical change to counter alienation may require structural change of social and material circumstances to make (more) self-determination and self-realization a matter of real options, or positive freedom, for all.[50]

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[49] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2018).

[50] To explore further the last point, we can identify (a) certain tendencies of agents regarding their important and valuable capacities and needs; (b) certain features of the material and social circumstances in which they live and act; and (c) certain alienated instances in which they pursue the fulfillment of those tendencies. Let me give some examples. (a) Regarding the tendencies, we can pick out those concerning self-determination and those concerning creativity, singular self-expression, and sociality (which fall under self-realization). (b) Regarding material and social circumstances, we can identify, in capitalism, the presence of relative material scarcity, the lack for many of secure access to means of subsistence (given lack of control of means of production), agents' ownership of their labor power,

Now, people develop more or less activist or passive stances towards alienation. For example, agents might adopt a thoroughly *voluntaristic* stance and, straightaway and without much concern about feasibility, seek to create an alternative condition that exactly matches their ideals. A possible problematic result of voluntarism is *wishful thinking*—the refusal to form beliefs about feasibility prospects that match the evidence available, or to gather evidence at all. Agents might instead adopt a *tragic* attitude, forgoing attempts to change their circumstances because they think this is infeasible. This attitude is tragic because agents do not lose sight of the ideals, and thus notice the gap between what they would like to be and what they think they can, or likely will, be. It differs from another passive attitude, which involves *adaptive preferences*—the lowering of agents' ideals to match what they believe they can get.[51] The cognitive dissonance implicit in the tragic attitude may lead agents to develop adaptive preferences. Adaptive preferences may also arise after voluntaristic endeavors in which agents fail to fulfill their ambitious but unrealistic plans.

An alternative, reasonable stance is to keep normative ideals high, be hard-nosed about feasibility assessments, and articulate social projects and experiments that dynamically push the feasibility frontier over time.[52] This would involve a form of political self-empowerment, or positive freedom, that gives human dignity the hopeful response it deserves.

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the use of markets for allocation of employment, investment, and consumption goods, and, given widespread market competition, the dominance of the motive of accumulation of capital or monetary value when deploying productive resources. (c) Turning to the alienated instances, we can identify the following. Creativity is incentivized by competition and insecurity, but its instances are alienated because the intrinsic value of what is created is not really crucial. What is paramount is that what is created is new and likely to be desired and purchased, not that it is worth desiring and purchasing. Self-determination and singularity are also partly incentivized by competition and market liberties, but their instantiation is alienated because what is important is above all to come up on top of others. This is ultimately frustrating given the impossibility of everyone being on top, the indifference to the well-being of others that this positional search encourages, and the anxiety it produces. Finally, consider sociality. Every economy requires cooperation and some form of reciprocity. But in capitalism the typical form of it involves, preponderantly and excessively, instrumental configurations. In capitalism, people approach others mostly as potential obstacles or resources for self-benefit. This turns sociality into a vector of utilization instead of also a medium of joint self-realization. Capitalism does not require reducing others completely to means. Capitalist property rights, self-ownership, and market relations involve normative limits to what may be done to others (limits not present in slavery, for example). But capitalism fails to sufficiently honor the dignitarian idea that others are ends in themselves rather than mere means. Arguably, a socialist society would alter the circumstances mentioned in (b) to allow for the tendencies mentioned in (a) an expression that is less alienated than (c).

[51] Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ch. III.

[52] Pablo Gilabert, "Justice and Feasibility. A Dynamic Approach." *Political Utopias: Contemporary Debates*, ed. M. Weber and K. Vallier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 95-126. Erik Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).