



Cooperating as Peers: Labor Justice between Distributive and Relational Equality

PhD thesis
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Some of the ideas presented in the thesis have been published in the article “Automation, Labor Justice, and Equality” *Ethics and Social Welfare* (2018), and will be published in a forthcoming chapter in the book, co-edited with L. Caranti, *Paradigms of Justice: Redistribution, Recognition, and Beyond*, London: Routledge (forthcoming, 2019).

I wish to dedicate the thesis to Samuele and Oscar, thanking them for their love, vitality, and ... infinite patience.

Introduction

Contemporary theories of justice seem to have little to say about work. Few authors believe that it raises questions of justice. Either work is seen as having the same philosophical weight as personal tastes, or it is considered to only raise problems relating to income. Despite its relevance, work is underrepresented in political philosophy. The subject tends to be entirely left to economists and sociologists. In this way, debates on social justice remain distant from real people's lives.

While many see in their work the central means for their self-development and self-realization, work can also be a means of subordination, social exclusion, and exploitation. Many injustices in our society are perpetuated through work. This happens when people are arbitrarily excluded from certain positions; the less desired tasks are reserved for the least-advantaged groups; workers are kept in relations of inferiority in the workplace, or they are confined to precarious life situations; it is denied that the work that people do is "work" at all, even if they create value and help meet social needs; and when status inequalities are reproduced through occupational segregation, or through free-riding on status- and class-biased hiring. Indeed, many oppressed groups are, one way or another, oppressed through work¹. Work is a powerful means for reproducing social inequalities. Work is also a source of profit and of social wealth. It produces individual aspirations and frustrations, political demands, normative conflicts and social tensions. And it mediates our relationship with the world and with others. Most of the time, our occupations (or lack thereof) shape our personalities and social identities, for what others see in us is first and foremost the work that we do, or the fact that we don't work – which may be simply because our work is not formally recognized. Work takes up most of our time. Many invest all of their lives into their work, and others strive to get the job of their dreams; some see work as a necessary and hopefully avoidable evil, necessary just to pay the bills. Work is the means through which society is produced and reproduced; it is how individuals and groups meet their mutual needs.

Thus, despite the central role played by work in the lives of individuals and in society, contemporary theories of justice seem to place work and the division of labor in a sort of 'norm-free zone', as if they do not deserve any normative attention, and lie outside the realms of justice. Whereas inequalities in wealth and income have been subject to a great deal of debate in the last few decades, we cannot say the same about labor inequalities. It is striking to note that most accounts of justice have mostly turned around the issue of competing patterns of goods allocation, with far less consideration being given to what people *do* besides just what they *own*. And yet, consider that many of us intuitively reject the idea that some people are 'naturally suited' to certain tasks, as in Aristotle's distinction between those naturally born to be slaves, and those born to intellectual contemplation. But this is far from being a bad memory. Even now some authors argue for naturalistic conceptions of the division of labor (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). While others do not explicitly make this case, the relative silence of theories of justice on the topic may implicitly convey the assumption that work and the division of labor do not raise concerns for justice, with the arguably unpleasant result that current forms of division of labor are naturalized. But it is sufficient to take a look around us to see that the organization of work doesn't merely reflect a naturally justified

¹ Of course, this does not mean that work is the *only* means of oppression.

order. What the sociologist Everett Hughes once called people's "occupational fate" (2017 [1958]) still occurs. People from certain groups are far more likely to occupy certain roles in the division of labor, benefiting from low autonomy, prestige, power, economic security, work quality, and leisure. The idea of occupational fate may be explained with the words of Bowles and Gintis: "like the weather, work 'happens' to people. A liberated, participatory, and creative alternative can hardly be imagined, much less experienced" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 130). Likewise, the organizational cultures that shape the division of labor tend to reproduce unquestioned and irrational familiar models of inequality (Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Dewey 2014; see Chapter IV). Such "organizational regimes" (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012) are far from natural – they embed culturally mediated patterns reproduced through a multiplicity of institutions, starting from school and the family (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Lareau 2011; see Chapter IV). Paraphrasing Hughes, besides the "occupational fate" experienced by individuals, one may talk about an 'organizational fate'. What resources does philosophy have to criticize the naturalistic conception of the division of labor? More broadly, how do theories of social justice address labor inequalities? Are we able to distinguish between fair and unfair forms of work? This thesis will show that the resources provided by contemporary views of justice are only partly equipped to address these problems. There is a risk here of implicitly revealing our normative impotence with respect to objectionable forms of labor. What need to be done, then, is to bring work and the division of labor back under critical scrutiny.

Consider that the idea of social cooperation is inherently two-sided. On the one hand, people cooperate primarily in the sense that they contribute to society through some form of work, and on the other hand, they participate through taxes and redistributively in the social good. This two-folded nature of social cooperation is expressed by the classical adage *from each according to their capacities, to each according to their needs*. The first half of the adage can be described as "contributive justice" (Gomberg 2007), while the second has to do with distributive justice. It seems that the first half is far less explored by political philosophers than the second. As Gregory Pence once stressed, "ideally, what is needed for work is a theory like the one Rawls developed for justice" (Pence 2001), and Lucas Stanczyk too emphasizes that a theory of "productive justice" is missing (Stanczyk 2012). This thesis helps to fill this gap, by taking the problem of labor justice seriously, with particular attention to labor inequalities.

It does so in three main ways. First, it asks the foremost theories of justice, especially distributive and relational models, whether and how they address issues of work, and whether they can provide resources to rethink work in terms of justice. Second, given that, as I will show, the allocation of goods alone cannot adequately deal with issues of labor justice, the thesis contributes to widening the scope of theories of justice beyond the prevailing distributive paradigm, providing new insights on work from alternative perspectives taken from recognition theory and relational egalitarianism. Third, the thesis assesses contemporary philosophical theories on work, asking whether they adequately address normative conflicts that arise from unequal forms of work, and suggests alternative paths for a satisfying conceptualization of fair work. Overall, four main lines of argument are pursued. First, the thesis argues that plausible theories cannot exclude work from the scope of justice. Second, it shows that one cannot be content with just the norm of autonomy when addressing work and the division of labor, for some conception of equality is needed. Third, it defends a multidimensional conception of labor justice, against the reduction of issues of work to issues

of income or recognition. Finally, it argues for a deontological perspective of labor justice, which is not grounded on competing conceptions of the ethical meaning of work, but rather on concerns for fairness compatible with pragmatic pluralism.

Theories of Justice and The Neglect of Work: The Debate

A brief look at scholar research engines reveals how little the subject has been addressed by distributive theorists of justice, with Michael Walzer as a notable exception (Walzer 1983). Most of this writing is aimed at providing reasons to exclude work from the scope of justice (see for instance Arneson 1987). In the last few decades, debates have mostly focused on questions concerning a just distribution of goods, placing work into the sphere of personal preference and casting it as a private issue. In this way, theorists have attributed to work the same philosophical weight as that belonging to personal tastes – to which, of course, considerations of justice do not apply. In contrast with this widespread assumption, in some cases implicit in theoretical attitudes and in others explicitly asserted (Nozick 1973; Arneson 1987; Kymlicka 2002), this thesis argues that work and the division of labor should not be restricted to the private sphere of personal preference: rather, both should enter theorizations of social justice in their own right.

Despite this underrepresentation (or deliberate exclusion), some theorists started to express normative concerns about work about three decades ago. In the 80s, Adina Schwartz reinterpreted Adam Smith's warnings on the stultification of workers in the manufacturing industry by addressing the concept of *meaningful work*. This concept has been recently relaunched and reconceptualized in various ways by a number of scholars (Roessler 2012; Yeoman 2014; Veltman 2016). In 1990, Iris Marion Young warned about the shortcomings of the distributive approach when it comes to injustices in the division of labor. The two chapters that Young devoted to this problem in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) are among the first attempts to challenge distributive theorists on the grounds of labor. It must be acknowledged that, in the 80s, Michael Walzer was a notable exception among distributive theorists, taking the issue of work seriously as a fully-fledged problem of justice (1983). These theorists began to break the deafening silence of theories of justice on the subject.

But these relatively isolated attempts to challenge the “distributive paradigm” (Young 1990) on the grounds of work seemed to echo weakly in the philosophical debates that followed. Iris Young may be one of the most debated contemporary theorists, but this has been mostly for her theorization of the notion of “political responsibility” and for her contribution to feminist theory, rather than for her sharp arguments about the division of labor. And it is only recently that Schwartz' idea of meaningful work has been relaunched in political philosophy². As for Michael Walzer, who addresses the problem of work as a case among others in his theory of complex equality, most attention has been given to other aspects of his thought.

The relative silence on the subject has come to an end in the last decade. The recently growing body of philosophical reflection on work proves that there is an increasing awareness on the key relevance of the issue. This is even more relevant in a world where work and its structures are radically changing, challenging old patterns of thought that ask for further

² Richard Arneson responded to Schwartz in 1987. However, in that article he argues that meaningful work is *not* a problem of justice.

investigation (Sennett 1999). New categories, new frameworks are needed to address work in a changing world.

However, the task is complicated by the highly heterogeneous nature of the debate, both in terms of the questions addressed, and the methodologies used. To begin with, while theorists of work often criticize the distributive paradigm for the inadequacy of its treatment of work, some authors have nonetheless attempted to offer a normative treatment of work *from within* the distributive framework. Essentially accepting its normative premises and methodology, they have attempted to “reform” the distributive framework from the inside, seeking elements that allow for a plausible inclusion of labor concerns. Some contemporary thinkers have thus tried to ‘force’ the Rawlsian normative core to take into account concerns about work; in order to do this, they have suggested stronger interpretations of some ambiguous references in Rawls’ writings on many aspects, such as meaningful work (Moriarty 2009), workplace democracy (Freeman 2007; Hsieh 2005; 2009; 2012), and occupational inequalities in complex work (Arnold 2012). The diversity of subjects addressed mirrors the heterogeneity, fragmentation and even relative reticence of Rawls’ conceptualization of work, which I will discuss in Chapter I.

Outside of these more or less timid attempts made within the distributive framework, most contributions on the subject lie outside of the distributive paradigm, and are often firmly in contrast with it. One of the most developed lines of research locates work in the realm of subjective self-realization, which is primarily focused on the meaning of work for individuals. In this context, many approach the problem either by drawing an ideal line under which work conditions become ethically objectionable, or by identifying some basic ethical requirements for work to be meaningful (Roessler 2012, Veltman 2016). This is done to justify the idea of meaningful work as a fundamental human need (Yeoman 2014) or to argue for an ethically charged ideal of a “fit” between personal aspirations and what the labor market actually offers (Muirhead 2004). In one way or another, all of these readings are centered on the moral norm of *autonomy*, involving different levels of perfectionism – from the minimum of Beate Roessler’s “moderately perfectionist liberalism” (2012) to the maximum of Andrea Veltman’s “eudaimonistic meaningful work” directed towards excellence (2016). Specularly, the post-work approaches argue for an ethical deflation of work, along with a shift of the core of self-realization from work to leisure, within a broader approach aspiring to an “ethics of the refusal of work” (Weeks 2011). Post-work views are usually associated with fears and enthusiasms relating to the automation of work (Williams and Srnicek 2015).

Opposing this, a growing line of research in social philosophy has attempted to defend the idea of the “centrality of work”, within a broader concern for social recognition in the workplace (Renault 2012; Dejours and Deranty 2010). Theorists of recognition have provided relevant insights on work, both by stressing the moral relevance of recognition for one’s work, in what has been called the *Leistungsprinzip* (Honneth 1996), and by highlighting the organizational roots of the pathologies of work due to misrecognition (Dejours 1998; 2007).

Other theorists have addressed the problem of inequalities in the division of labor by developing a critique of the liberal ideal of equality of opportunity, and by arguing for stronger interpretations of the idea of self-realization through work which follows the Aristotelian tradition (Murphy 1993) and the Sen-Nussbaum paradigm, requiring more engaged forms of social commitment, such as task rotation (Gomberg 2007, Sayer 2009). Some timid, but brilliant attempts to shed light on the normative problems raised by the organization of

production (Hsieh 2008) have been formulated in the last few years (Stanczyk 2012). A growing strand of authors coming from the Republican tradition has recently attempted to widen the scope of justice so as to take into account concerns for fair labor structures, grounded in the notion of freedom as non-domination by arbitrary interference (Gourevitch 2011; 2014; Hsieh 2005; 2009; 2012; Anderson 2015).

This highly heterogeneous, growing body of research provides different answers to different questions, but the idea that work and its structures require further philosophical exploration is becoming increasingly shared. Even if I have traced them back to a common area of investigation, these authors address considerably different questions. At a closer level of inspection, one might say that they do not even take part in the same debate. For example, some authors address the problem of meaningful work, some address the problem of hierarchical labor structures, and some the problem of lack of authority within organizations – which, although related, are very different issues.

Indeed, talking about “work” in political philosophy is too generic, not only because this category is comprehensive and includes very different activities and social contexts (see for instance Pence 2001), but also because in the growing debate on the subject, different kinds of questions pointing to different goals can be discerned. The different areas can be summed up as follows:

1. *The meaning of work*, which concerns the internal features of work, the nature of the tasks performed, the subjective conditions of work, the role that work plays or should play in individuals’ lives, and its value in society as a whole.
2. *Workplace democracy*, which involves the problems of power and of workers’ participation in decision-making processes within companies, in terms of organizational norms, deliberative rules and economic control.
3. *Recognition at work*, which has to do with the dynamics of recognition at play in the workplace, and the social esteem gained for one’s contribution (*Leistungsprinzip*).
4. *Labor inequalities*, which relate to hierarchical work structures and to the “vertical” aspects of the division of labor, as well as to the highly stratified nature of contribution.

With some exceptions, among these subjects of research, labor inequalities are the least investigated by political philosophers. The idea of labor justice – which I will refer to as *work fairness* and *contributive justice*³ interchangeably – is intended to reposition the perspective in an alternative way.

The main theses of the views just referred to can be summed up as follows:

1. *Distributive*: labor justice spontaneously follows from the fair allocation of goods.
2. *Ethical/1 – Meaningful work*: workers should be autonomous at work and their activities should give a sense of purpose and self-realization.
3. *Ethical/2 – Post-work*: work should no longer be conceived of as the core of human self-realization; an ethics of the refusal of work should be pursued instead.
4. *Recognition-centered*: in order for a worker to have a positive relation to the self, their contributions should be socially appreciated and esteemed (*Leistungsprinzip*).
5. *Contributive*: simple and routine tasks prevent workers from flourishing, and thus should be shared by all.
6. *Republican*: workers’ lives and activities should not be subject to arbitrary interference.

³ Paul Gomberg proposed the concept of “contributive justice” (2007). However, I will use the expression in an independent way.

7. *Democratic*: the worst aspects of the division of labor lie in powerlessness and can be dealt with via democratic decision-making.

The thesis will engage in a dialogue with all of these views, highlighting their weaknesses and strengths, and ultimately suggesting alternative routes for a satisfying conception of labor justice.

Aims of the Thesis

The perspective of labor justice that I argue for proposes a series of normative “shifts” with respect to current philosophical understandings of work. It is worth anticipating them in the Introduction, in order to give an idea of the overall project of the thesis.

- *From the private to the public sphere.*

One aim of the thesis is to show that the exclusion of work and the division of labor from accounts of justice is not justified. Using the term “justice” with regards to labor, we locate the problem outside of the sphere of competing conceptions of the good. The perspective that I advocate thus differs from most contemporary readings, for it is grounded in the assumption that work and the division of labor are rooted in social structures, and thus cannot be dismissed as issues of mere subjective preferences. Bringing both into the public sphere, the normative focus of work shifts from the problem of subjective conceptions of the good to the problem of fair participation in social cooperation.

- *From one-dimensional to multidimensional justice.*

When issues of work are taken into account, this is mostly done in economic terms. Wages, income, and opportunities are the most prominent standpoints from which justice in general, and also justice at work, are addressed. Yet it is argued that labor inequalities are not reducible to, and no less important than, economic inequalities. Issues of wage, income and wealth are, to be sure, a crucial part of the problem. But this is only half of the story. The complexities of work inequalities as well as the social differentiation of contemporary society call for a more comprehensive perspective, able to grasp the relational features, the symbolic dimension, the norms, and procedures of power at stake. Against a one-dimensional conception of justice, the thesis argues for a multidimensional perspective, requiring a plural and complex response to realize labor justice, which simultaneously involves the economic, relational, political and contributive dimensions.

- *Complementing autonomy with equality.*

Most contemporary philosophical approaches on work ground their views in the moral norm of autonomy. Indeed, perspectives that appear philosophically very distant from one another, coming from very different traditions, unanimously converge on autonomy – for instance, distributive, recognition, meaningful work and post-work theories all in some way make use of the norm. However, it will be shown that without a conception of equality, the critical-normative potential of the idea of autonomy is too narrow, and tolerates unacceptable levels of inequality. Situations like racialized dirty work, the gendered division of labor, status-biased occupational segregation, the unfair distribution of the socially necessary tasks, as well as phenomena like technology-driven unemployment and heteromation (Ekbja and Nardi 2014), cannot be adequately addressed only in terms of autonomy. Autonomy is a crucial norm, but alone has limited scope: with these normative tools at our disposal, we cannot say much about acceptable inequality in work structures, both at a local or global level. The fact, for example,

that migrants take the least desired jobs or that women suffer from forms of exclusion and gender segregation at work can be addressed, with these tools at our disposal, only in terms of individual autonomy in the workplace. Sure, migrants and women may enjoy some autonomy in their work, but this would not make their situation automatically just, which is one of unfair participation in social cooperation. Some conception of equality, thus, is needed. The thesis will clarify that the idea of equality should not be intended as mere “sameness”, nor has it anything to do with the abolition of occupational specialization. Thus the thesis aims at introducing into the philosophical debate on work an under-represented concern for equality, arguing that autonomy without equality results in an elitist conception of labor justice, where self-realization at work ends up being a privilege for the few, often relying on outsourced work to the least advantaged. Yet, how we ought to apply a conception of equality to work structures is far from obvious: what exactly would that mean? In what way can a principle of equality be conceived of in work relations? Indeed, concerns for work contribute to “expanding the egalitarian toolbox” (Anderson 2008) at our disposal. Attempting to answer these questions is part of the project.

- *From the ‘outside of work’ to the ‘inside of work’.*

Distributive theorists typically address the problem of work through the principles of free occupational choice and equality of opportunity. They stop, so to speak, at the door of work: what happens after people have secured free choice and equal opportunities is not a matter of justice. The labor justice view that I will defend here contests this purely external conception which offers only a lateral conception of work, which does not enter into considerations of work relations, power asymmetries, and organizational cultures and norms that reproduce patterns of inequality and injustice. Instead of restricting moral concerns to the act of freely choosing an occupation, stopping at the door of work, my view points to the *internal* structures, relations, norms and content of work.

- *From the inherent meaning of work and human nature to fair participation in social cooperation.*

Many theories locate work in the sphere of personal tastes. They ask: what’s the meaning of work for human life? Should we work to flourish? They don’t ask questions like: how do we ensure that work and its structures are fair for all? Most theories, today, tell us that work is a matter of subjective preferences, personal ends, and judgements of value. In this way, they claim that it has nothing to do with justice, and thus deny the possibility of discerning between fair and unfair forms of work. Rather, I will claim that work should fall under the scope of justice and that political theorists should endeavor to provide tools to identify unjust forms of work. This can be possible only by shifting the normative focus from the problem of the inherent meaning of work and self-realization, to the problem of fair conditions of social cooperation. In order to do that, the thesis reframes the issue as not one that concerns the meaning of work or competing ethical understandings of its role in human nature, but rather as one which deals with fairness in participation to social cooperation. It is thus not necessary to define once and for all any inherent meaning of work or of human nature. In so doing, it aims to provide some conceptual resources to identify unfair forms of work and work structures and to rethink them. Even though ethical discourses about work contribute to our social self-understanding as individuals living in complex societies, and because they have an impact on the way people assess policies and claims, the pluralism in the interpretations of the meaning of work should be taken as an inescapable tenet of contemporary societies. Providing normative answers on the meaning of work entails the exclusion from the spectrum of justice

of those who do not agree with the definitions proposed. For example, work can be seen either as the core of self-realization or as a hopefully avoidable duty: what work should mean for people's lives should not be prescribed by philosophers once for all. If some basic requirements can be objectively identified as necessary for work to be decent and just, this operation should not be grounded on a supposed fundamental 'essence' or preemptively defined, ethically loaded meaning of work. Nor should it be grounded on some preemptive definition of human nature, as 'inherently' inclined to work. Paternalism and essentialism are the risks here. The perspective should thus be different: whatever our ideas on the internal meaning on work and human nature may be, work and the division of labor are social phenomena in the first place that require fairness as a priority concern. People have needs, and work provides responses to those needs; the goal is to make sure that, in meeting their mutual needs, there is no injustice. Rather than deciding whether or not work is the source of human virtue, we are to make sure that the means through which these needs are met are not unfair, demanding excessive costs to some to the benefit of others.

Of course, this does not mean that perfect value neutrality is actually possible. I am not claiming a position of perfect neutrality, for this would mean denying the culturally specific and limited perspective that the human gaze inevitably has. Likewise, I am not arguing that ethical discourses around work are not relevant. Quite on the contrary, they shape worldviews about work that have an indirect impact on the social acceptance of policies and claims, and thus on their chances to be realized. Therefore, the perspective might be better qualified as *pragmatically pluralist*, because it does not claim to be grounded on value neutrality, but rather on the pragmatic awareness that in the world there are competing interpretations of work and its ethical meaning, which it is not the task of labor justice to decide. A conception of labor justice does not need to take a position in the longstanding dispute of whether we should work because it is prescribed by our supposed human nature, or whether we should not work because it goes against our fundamental interests in leisure: what matters primarily is to ensure that work is fair, regardless of the ethical meanings we attribute to it as a whole. The thesis argues that labor justice should be defended not from the standpoint of the happiness of some, but rather from the perspective of fairness for all; or that the latter has some sort of priority over the former. In order to reframe the question, the perspective must be shifted from the level of the individual to the structures of labor, which include the division of labor in the household, in organizations, in the global chains of value. From paternalism and subjectivism, one should shift towards pragmatic pluralism and social interdependence. This position has practical consequences in the current debate about work, for ethical views are far prevailing over considerations of justice. The risk of any ethics of the "refusal of work", as well as of "meaningful work", is precisely that without concerns for justice, there is the risk of conveying a view of "refusal of work (or meaningful work) for the few" – that is, an exclusivist normative ideal on work.

These goals will converge on a conception of labor justice that may be called *multidimensional, relational, egalitarian, deontological* and *pragmatic-pluralist*. Rather than constituting an ideal model or a fully-fledged theory of justice, this alternative reading should be more modestly thought of as providing a normative standard and moral lexicon from which to assess existing forms of work, thereby potentially laying the ground for a theory of labor justice. What results may thus not be an accomplished theory of justice, but some premises that can facilitate us in arriving at such a theory.

The contribution of the thesis to the field is thus multifaceted. Broadly speaking, the thesis contributes to the debate on social justice by expanding the scope of existing theories to take into account concerns for work. First, it considers models of distributive justice from the perspective of work, which has been done by few authors. Second, it contributes to the normative debate on work by providing insights for a deontological, rather than teleological, conception of fair work, which has so far been missing from the debate. Finally, it contributes to debates on relational egalitarianism and critical theory in essentially two ways: firstly, it expands the scope of relational egalitarian concerns for social equality, so as to include the division of labor; secondly, it assesses the models of work that are explicitly or potentially present in critical theory. The originality of the thesis thus lies in two fundamental features: it broadens the scope of existing theories of justice so as to include concerns for labor justice, and it provides tools to discern unfair labor structures.

Inequality of What? Labor Justice and Multidimensionality

Before beginning the discussion, it is worth reflecting on some relevant distinctions, to be intended as both sociological and normative, that will play a crucial role in the argumentation that follows. I anticipate these points here in the introduction, for they represent important tools in the discussion from the first chapter.

The idea that labor justice is inherently multidimensional and, as such, that it should be addressed in a multidimensional way, has been only partly considered so far⁴. In the following chapters, I will clarify the meaning of multidimensionality. For now, it is sufficient to note that most theorists focus either on one dimension of labor justice *or* on the other: in so doing, however, they overlook features that are relevant from the perspective of justice. Multidimensionality is therefore not a rhetorical choice or a mere discursive strategy. In the following chapters, I will argue that there are precise theoretical reasons to defend multidimensionality.

“Labor justice” consists of the normative questions jointly raised by four key dimensions of work and the division of labor, which I summarize as follows:

1. the *distributive-economic* dimension, concerning people’s fair access to social wealth, freedom from material need, fairness in wage and income, and fair access to work positions;
2. the *social-relational* dimension, concerning the relationships involved in work structures, particularly with respect to status and prestige hierarchies, as well as subjective recognition;
3. the *political-democratic* dimension, concerning decision-making processes and procedures, and authority and control involved in work organizations; and
4. the *contributive* dimension, which looks at the nature of the tasks and occupations as well as one’s control over labor time (qualitative and quantitative sides).

I will argue that a labor justice perspective requires that all these dimensions be jointly addressed. From this perspective, inequality in the division of labor is unjust when people suffer from economic maldistribution (*economic dimension*), their positions in labor structures

⁴ With the partial exception of Gheaus and Herzog (2014), who however still use an ‘allocative language’ for all of the different “goods of work” they identify, and Michael Walzer (1983), who considers the problem of dirty work as crosscutting with a number of spheres of justice.

and their work are status-biased (*relational dimension*), they cannot take part in decisions concerning their work (*political dimension*), and when low quality jobs are reserved for certain groups, who have no control over their labor time (*contributive dimension*). Note that all of these dimensions can be regarded from a variety of perspectives: from the perspective of the individual experience of work, of the social division of labor, of the global chains of value, and of formal and informal organizations (companies, corporations, and even the household, etc.). These dimensions should be understood as crosscutting with a number of *scales of justice*.

They can also be used to identify distinct forms of labor inequality. Indeed, talking about “contributive inequality” is as indeterminate as talking about “work”. In fact, one may reasonably ask what kinds of inequalities we are talking about. Is it mere inequality of tasks performed and of roles in the division of labor? Thus it is important to distinguish between the mere fact of *occupational differentiation* and what I mean here by *contributive inequality*.

Occupational differentiation refers to the simple fact that workers perform different roles and tasks in the division of labor. This, as a matter of fact, occurs in complex societies, and it does not seem to raise particular objections: the mere fact that, say, Laura is a lawyer and Alex is a physician, is not itself objectionable. On the contrary, differences and forms of specialization should be taken a source of richness and variety (Rawls 2001). Marx talked about the possibility that one could “fish in the morning, hunt in the evening, and criticize after dinner” in a well-known passage of *The German Ideology*, which has been interpreted by many as arguing for the *abolition* of the division of labor. This interpretation has been contested: Marx does not criticize the mere existence itself of the division of labor; he criticizes a particular form of it (Llorente 2006; Rattansi 1983). So far, no social movement has ever called into question the mere fact of differentiation in the tasks and roles of the division of labor. There is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic reason to object to it. In short, it would be misguided to focus on the fact of occupational differentiation as a source of normative concern (see also Dahrendorf 1972).

By contrast, broadly speaking, what I suggest to call *labor* or *contributive inequality* refers to the fact that work and the division of labor are structured in such a way that people have divergent entitlements to work quality and prospects. Contributive inequality points to the highly stratified nature of contribution that affects workers in the division of labor, and the specifically contributive nature of the related advantages and disadvantages attached to different positions, beyond issues of wage (even if wage is, of course, a crucial part of the problem). The contributively advantaged are a group of workers who benefit from rewarding jobs and social prestige; they have room for self-determination and self-expression in the workplace, and for the development of their capacities; they have the chance to find meaning and purpose in their work and in their role within the system of social cooperation. By contrast, the contributively disadvantaged, which suffer from what I will call *miscontribution* and *contributive subordination* to be considered as forms of injustice distinctively rooted in the way work is organized, reap very few rewards, have no social prestige, little choice in their work activities, and little say in establishing the terms of their work relations; they have no possibility for self-expression and few opportunities to find meaning or purpose through the tasks that they perform. Furthermore, they differ in their relationship to labor time autonomous control. This contributive gap is somewhat in line with the distinction between “professionals” and “nonprofessionals” discussed by Iris Marion Young, as critically relevant for justice and as exceeding the distributive paradigm (Young 1990, 192-222). Importantly,

these groups have different career prospects. Whereas professionals have access to career progression, nonprofessionals have very few opportunities for mobility. The contributive gap is deeply tied to differences in class (Giddens 1983; Young 1990) and status (Hughes 2017 [1958]; Ridgeway 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993).

Samuel Arnold has suggested that “occupational inequality” concerns the fact that jobs “convey unequal packages of the primary goods of authority, responsibility, and complexity” (Arnold 2012, 106). As we shall see, Arnold derives the ideas of “authority, responsibility, and complexity” from a discussion on the Rawlsian primary good of PPO (see Chapter I, §2.2). While his definition might be compelling, I prefer to embrace a more comprehensive idea of “occupational inequality” which I call *labor* or *contributive inequality*. Whereas “authority, responsibility, and complexity” point to the internal nature of work and tasks, the perspective that I would like to embrace is a broader one, which takes into account the inner multidimensionality of work as well as its inequalities.

Roughly developed ideas of contributive inequality are already present in some philosophical accounts, even though they are not explicitly presented in these terms. For example, John Rawls (see Chapter I) expresses concerns about the lack of variety in the tasks and the presence of servile dependence in the workplace. Michael Walzer highlights the normative importance of the social segregation of dirty workers (see Chapter II). Basic income theorists are concerned with the lack of bargaining power of workers under conditions of economic constraint (see Chapter II). Axel Honneth points to the lack of opportunities for achievement in terms of social esteem for one’s unique capacities (see Chapter III). Meaningful work theorists mostly focus on the distinction between conception and execution (Schwartz 1982) as does Paul Gomberg (2007; see Chapter V). André Gorz talked about a “labor aristocracy” (Gorz 2004) which could be seen as a rough equivalent of the 1% enjoying the best jobs, compared to a large mass of contributively disadvantaged (see also Sennett 1999; Standing 2011). As recalled earlier, Iris Marion Young points to the distinction between professionals and nonprofessionals as rooted in the class division of society and as conveying a number of other inequalities. All of these different concepts point, one way or another, to an idea of contributive inequality and unfairly stratified hierarchical division of labor that cannot be fully addressed with the theoretical resources at our disposal.

In the third part of the thesis, I will argue in detail for a multidimensional conception of labor justice. I will suggest the norm of *contributive parity* as a standard by which to assess current structures of work and to imagine fairer work. To summarize, contributive parity means that in a community of equals, all should be able to contribute to social cooperation as peers, equally benefiting from technological change in economic, relational, democratic, and contributive terms. By “parity” I do not mean mere “sameness”, or something like the suppression of task differentiation, but rather a relational notion that objects to people being treated as “inferiors” in the division of labor with respect to the various dimensions of equality. Contributive parity is a reinterpretation in the sphere of work of the principle of “participatory parity” suggested by Nancy Fraser (2003), which is derived in turn from the principle of the equal moral worth of all people. When it comes to work, the egalitarian stance expressed by the idea of participatory parity is no less relevant than the idea of autonomy when it comes to work⁵. In light of this principle, forms of work are objectionable not because workers do not align with a predefined ethical idea of work, flourishing, and human nature, but because they

⁵ On this, I disagree with Beate Roessler (2007, 162).

are prevented from contributing as peers. Contributive parity should be understood as an inherently multidimensional concern, given the diversification of spheres of contemporary society (Walzer 1982; Scanlon 1997; Fraser 2003; Wolff 2013) and the insufficiency of a merely allocative response. The relationship between these dimensions should ensure that normative responses take into account the multidimensional nature of contributive parity.

In order to understand the reasons why a multidimensional perspective is preferable to a one-dimensional perspective, consider the phenomenon of occupational segregation, which I will explore in Chapter IV. Occupational segregation means that people tend to enter occupations that society considers ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ according to their status, determining the so-called “labor queues”, and which reserves “the best jobs (e.g., those with higher pay, job security, and autonomy) for the most-favored groups”, while “members of less-favored groups (e.g., women and racial/ethnic minorities) are consigned to the lower-paying jobs with less security and autonomy” (Hinze 2007). Occupational segregation is a multidimensional phenomenon, simultaneously rooted in economic inequalities, as well as in status inequality and contributive inequality – which in turn translates into lower levels of power. The norm of contributive parity, I will argue, is far better suited to addressing the injustice of cases like that of occupational segregation, rather than the norm of autonomy. Indeed, it may be described as an egalitarian norm with relevant liberal elements.

Methodology

The thesis is indebted to a number of heterogeneous traditions in contemporary political philosophy, some of which do not usually come into contact with one another. It engages in dialogue with analytical political philosophy as well as with critical theory. It borrows from the sociology of work and status inequalities a lexicon and tools that philosophy alone cannot offer, in order to provide a sociologically informed philosophical account of labor justice. Insights from feminist theory are present as well, which I address within the broader framework of labor justice and contributive inequalities. In this way, I consider gender to be one of the many social divisions – along with class and race⁶ – that the contributive organization of society can confine to the lowest rungs of the labor ladder.

It is well-known that analytical political philosophy and critical theory have different methodologies. As I will explain in Part II, they tend to deal with similar problems, but do so without taking part in the same debates. For instance, analytical political philosophers do not aim at grounding their views on the “implicit normativity” of existing social movements, as critical theory does. This thesis makes it clear that both the analytical and immanent approaches lose something valuable by avoiding this dialogue. The analytical approach lacks the dynamism, agonism and processual character particular to critical theory’s account of social reality. Critical theory, by contrast, may benefit from the sophisticated, internally nuanced and analytically rigorous conceptualizations of analytical political philosophy. I will discuss this point with respect to the problems of recognition, equality and status in Part II. I will show that the connections between the debates on recognition and relational egalitarianism may widen the normative scope of both. To be sure, this connection may only be possible when considering the deontological strand of critical theory.

⁶ For a critical analysis on the normative relevance of the concept of ‘race’, see Bessone 2013.

The thesis engages in dialogues with different traditions that share an interest in social justice despite the fact that they conceptualize it in different ways. Without pre-emptively embracing one or the other tradition, the thesis benefits from the advantages of a pluralist perspective. On the one hand, it shares with critical theory an interest in social transformation, and rejects the illusion of the detachment of theory from social reality – a reference to actually existing normative conflicts should at least implicitly orient theory. On the other hand, it shares with analytical political philosophy the need not to collapse the theory into the existent. Note that in this context, the problem of work looks particularly suited to integrating these perspectives. Work is a key issue that raises both *theoretical challenges* to existing theories of justice, and at the same time it is historically at the core of *social conflicts and political demands*. Work is at the crossroads of multiple key normative expectations, and the joint consideration of different insights helps to improve our understanding of it.

Accordingly, in the thesis I consider debates that are not used to talking to each other, such as: the debates on meaningful work and post-work ethics; the debates on recognition and social equality from the perspective of work; and the debates on contributive justice and distributive and relational justice. In this way, the thesis embraces a pluralistic stance not only with respect to its contents, but also in terms of its methodology. This is grounded on the assumption that since the problem of work is complex and multifaceted, the methodology should mirror this complexity. Overall, the thesis aims at providing a critical-normative perspective of justice in work and the division of labor, by considering political philosophy as a toolbox for addressing the difficult issues of our time. Therefore, the thesis should be seen as attempting to keep together analytical rigor and political imagination, connecting philosophical discourse with social reality.

The thesis proceeds by exploring the way existing models of justice address the problem of work, and then treating these models as providing resources that can be included in an account of the distinct dimensions of labor justice. This means that labor justice will be addressed from a plurality of perspectives, reflecting on labor justice as distribution, as recognition and relational equality, as fair contribution, and as democratization. Each model will be assessed from a double perspective: theoretical and practical. The former perspective essentially explores whether a model is theoretically compelling. The practical perspective assesses a model by asking whether and how it would solve a particular case of unequal division of labor in our society which raises normative concerns. This practical assessment of the model will be called the “contributive justice test”, and it will appeal to a number of cases of unequal divisions of labor that raise challenges to existing models of justice. These include racialized dirty work, occupational segregation, the division between task conception and task execution, gendered housework, and heteromation. This practical perspective is supposed to complement the theoretical consideration of the models by investigating whether and how they provide resources to address real world problems.

Moreover, as far as the discussion proceeds, some “conditions of labor justice” will be identified as necessary to reframe the problem of work. These conditions will be referred to as the normative differentiation and multidimensionality condition, the pragmatic pluralism condition, and the social interdependence condition. By these conditions, a conception of labor justice cannot be satisfying if work is entirely reduced to income or recognition; if its internal multidimensionality is overlooked; if our normative view on work is grounded on a strongly perfectionist interpretation of the role of work in human life and thus on paternalism; and if

the perspective is limited to the individual experience of work, without taking into account the social interdependence – both vertical and horizontal – of the division of labor.

Moreover, it is increasingly clear that work and the division of labor should be considered from a global perspective. The ideas developed should be considered as involving a number of levels, which may be called *scales of labor justice*. That is, labor justice should be understood as involving a number of differently sized sites and organizations, on a growing scale starting from the household, modest economic units, firms and corporations, and ending at global economic structures. That means that one cannot abstract from the global interdependencies of labor. Notions developed by sociologists and economists in the last decades, like the international division of labor (Nash 1985) and the global chains of value (Gereffi 1994; 1999; Yeates 2004; Dorigatti et al.), call political philosophers to widen their perspective. Such concepts importantly highlight the interdependent nature of the global geography of contributive advantages and disadvantages⁷.

Before proceeding, I offer some further clarifications concerning what this thesis will and will not offer. First, the thesis does not restrict the perspective to work in the formal economy. This is the why I use the term “contribution” rather than “production”; in so doing, I avoid confining my normative concerns only to traditional forms of work, potentially excluding forms of labor which are not fully acknowledged by society as ‘work’, or whose status as such is contested. This has a precise and substantive rationale, in that it is part of a perspective of justice on work that calls into question preestablished normative definitions of work. There is “a struggle over what counts as work” (Weeks 2011) that cannot be overlooked by a normative account. Indeed, Nancy Fraser refers to “the boundaries between the production and reproduction” – that is, between socially recognized work and work that reproduces society outside of the formal economy (such as care). These boundaries are being redefined by social movements and cannot be assumed as unproblematic and given in the background. A perspective of justice should integrate into its framework the normative problem of the “boundary struggles” (Fraser 2016a) between what is socially viewed as “work” and what it is not. Moreover, the boundaries between the two are increasingly challenged by changes in the traditional schedule of working hours through technology. Consider the notion of “playbour” (Kücklich 2005), which calls into question the fact that technological devices increasingly involve people in online activities producing value for companies (Cardon and Casilli 2015). The idea that work continues after we clock out of the office thus not only relates to care and reproductive labor, but also to technology and the intrusive way in which it can require us to work when we are supposed to enjoy leisure.

Second, the thesis will not include a chapter on the problem of what work actually means. Every book on the topic usually addresses this complex problem. But as I have just highlighted, what counts as work is a controversial issue raising normative conflicts in society. This doesn’t mean, however, that since there are normative conflicts around it, *everything we do* counts as work. Without entering into this complex debate, for our purposes it is sufficient to embrace a relatively broad, and still not too large, definition of work which I borrow from the sociologist J. Budd, as “a purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion

⁷ Indeed, while true in general, the neglect of issues of labor justice is particularly true also with respect to global justice. A valuable exception is the important work of Iris Marion Young. Young addressed the issue of sweatshops mostly in terms of whether third countries should be deemed responsible for the deadening working conditions of other countries. Her notion of *political responsibility* importantly shifts the debate on global responsibility from a guilt-oriented view to a “political” one (Young 2004; 2011).

that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value” (Budd 2016, 29). This definition is sufficiently large so as to also include forms of work that lie outside of the official economy. Along these same lines, I will not make use of the Arendtian terminology which distinguishes between “work” and “labor”; I will use these terms in an interchangeable way.

Third, all of these clarifications help to point out that it is not the purpose of this thesis to ground its analysis on a supposed fundamental nature of work and its connection with human nature. The analysis does not assume or argue for this. Unlike many contemporary accounts, I won’t search for an “essence” of work, or a fundamental ethic. What interests me in this thesis is social justice and that the fair conditions of social cooperation extend to work and the division of labor, beyond paternalistic, essentialist, and merely distributive accounts. Without claiming an essence of work, my purpose is to lay the groundwork for a broader project that expands the realm of freedom and equality to include a domain that has historically been excluded from it – work. Rather than sanctifying or demonizing work, the purpose is to transform it. With this, I certainly do not deny that work may be the object of deep symbolic and emotional investment; rather, I simply argue that defending an essence or an ethic of work is not necessary for social justice.

Fourth, it is important to clarify that by “labor justice” I do not mean specific issues concerning the legislation on work, but rather a broader philosophical concern for fairness in the way that work is organized. Therefore, talking about justice entails a broader concern than state intervention. Labor justice points to a broader involvement of institutions, organizations, individuals and groups, in the project of making the norms, practices and organizational cultures of work fairer. The normative territory of labor justice is thus a philosophical one, aiming at discussing normative cores and philosophical models rather than policy issues. Nonetheless, as it happens with most theories of justice, policy makers may hopefully draw from discussions of justice some broad normative orientations, which remain to be realized by the actors of a determinate political moment and place.

Finally, let me specify further what this thesis will not be about. Given their breadth, it is impossible to treat *all* the aspects involved in work and the division of labor. Thus, for example, I won’t dwell on the very important problem of education, even though I will discuss some related issues when it comes to equality of opportunity. This problem would need an extensive consideration that may require a thesis in itself. Likewise, I won’t explore classical debates on the philosophy of work, such as Karl Marx’s view on alienation or Hannah Arendt’s theory. Many authors have already done this in a brilliant way (see for example Yeoman 2014; Jaeggi 2014).

Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into three parts. In part I, it begins from a critical scrutiny of distributive models of justice; in part II, it explores alternative perspectives on work – namely, recognition-centered and relational perspectives; and in part III, it addresses the democratic and contributive dimensions of labor justice. More precisely, the thesis will follow a number of steps that it is worth outlining here.

First, the thesis scrutinizes representative models of distributive justice – liberal-egalitarian, allocative-libertarian, pluralist, and luck-egalitarian/socialist – asking whether

and how they address issues of work and whether they may provide resources to address normative problems raised by unequal work structures. Second, the thesis develops the resources that recognition theories and relational egalitarianism debates can offer to address status inequalities in the division of labor, which include problems of status exploitation (due to citizenship, gender and race), occupational segregation, and differential levels of social worth and prestige attributed to different occupations. Third, the thesis assesses how contemporary normative approaches on work conceptualize labor justice and whether they provide ways to include concerns for equality at work. Fourth, it aims to justify the idea that concerns of autonomy and freedom – on which most contemporary approaches to work are grounded – are to be complemented with concerns of equality (which is not to be understood as mere sameness or as opposition to task differentiation). Fifth, since the requirements of labor justice cannot be met by free occupational choice or income redistribution alone, but relate also to social relationships, decision-making processes, and the nature of tasks and occupations, the thesis advocates a multidimensional conception of labor justice. It is thus argued that labor justice requires that different dimensions of equality be met: *economic-distributive* (equal economic security for real free occupational choice and equal access to social wealth); *social-relational* (people are to be treated as equals); *political-democratic* (people must be able to take part in decisions that concern their work); and *contributive* (strategies for meaningful and self-directed work and free time must be available to all). Sixth, the thesis proposes a criterion for assessing competing strategies of labor justice, as well as a normative standard to help envisage possible fair work structures. According to this standard called *contributive parity*, unjust work structures and forms of work are to be changed because they prevent people from contributing to social cooperation as peers – not because they do not meet some inherent meaning of work or fail to fulfill some predefined idea of human nature. Seventh, the thesis distinguishes between affirmative and transformative strategies to implement these principles, suggesting some possible configurations in which labor justice may be realized. Finally, the *principle of the joint dimensions* will be proposed as a criterion useful to decide between competing contributive patterns.

This multidimensional conception of labor justice avoids the paternalistic consequences and moral solipsism of some theories of meaningful work, while still defending the need for justice at work. That is, it shifts the focus from the problem of the *meaning of work* to the problem of *fair cooperation*, in order to avoid prescribing any substantive view in contrast to legitimate pluralist interpretations about the meaning of work. This is by no means grounded in a “workist” ethics, but rather in a pragmatic awareness that no “end of work” (Rifkin 1995) is on the horizon, and work is needed to satisfy inescapable social needs. We ought, then, turn the normative gaze to work structures that are marked by contributive inequalities and stratified self-realization, reserving the lowest rungs of the labor ladder for the most vulnerable groups.

PART I

Work and Distributive Justice

In the last decades, problems of justice have been mostly addressed in distributive terms: debates have mostly turned around the question of the ideal way to distribute certain valuable sets of goods – i.e. wealth, rights, income, opportunities, services – among the members of society. Accordingly, the idea of “redistribution” is generally associated with wealth and income – that is, inequality is thought of as “economic”. To be sure, the inequality of the distribution of wealth is a crucial problem. However, inequalities in what people *do*, rather than in what they *own*, are hardly addressed. Work constitutes the core of societies’ production and reproduction as well as that of individuals’ lives, and yet injustices concerning work and the division of labor are starkly under-represented in debates concerning social justice. What theorists have had to say on the subject does not match up to the pervasive role of work in our lives.

The exclusion of work from the scope of justice is due to two essential assumptions, shared in different forms by most distributive thinkers. First, the idea that work is a matter of private preference, not of justice. Second, the idea that justice has essentially to do with the allocation of goods, among which work is either to be excluded (with exceptions), or exhausted by the “allocative gesture”. Both of these assumptions underlie the distributive discourse and tend to shape the whole normative debate on work. I will argue that they are by no means necessary. There are ways to address work and the division of labor which make possible considering together concerns of pluralism and concerns of justice, beyond the false antithesis that has led to the *impasse* of the “privatization” of work. Second, I will argue that the distributive logic, while essential on the one hand, should on the other hand be complemented with other distinct perspectives of justice, to be considered as co-essentials of distribution.

In order to explore these problems, it is necessary to scrutinize in detail the way distributive models of justice address work and the division of labor, assessing the reasons for either their neglect, under-estimation, or inadequate consideration of the matter. In the distributive landscape, it seems that four main positions on work can be discerned, strictly connected with the two assumptions I have just outlined. In the next two chapters, I will show that the following theses are either implicitly or explicitly assumed by contemporary models of distributive justice:

- The first position dismisses work as a matter of private preference, lying outside of the realm of justice. Since questions of social justice do not extend to personal choices and their conceptions of the good because of freedom and pluralism, work should not be part of a theory of justice. Call this the *personal preference* thesis.
- The second position tends to consider work as a means for pursuing other relevant goods and, consequently, to believe that injustices rooted in the division of labor can be redressed through the distribution of other goods (i.e. income, opportunities) in a satisfying way. There is an implicit reductionist assumption here: that work can be reduced to, for example, income. This thesis is strictly related to the significance accorded to issues of class and economic justice within distributive theories. I will show that, quite surprisingly, this position is shared by views that are often seen as antithetical: liberalism and socialism. Call this the *derivative* thesis.

- Typically, the *derivative* position approaches labor justice “from the outside”, restricting normative concerns to the “door” of work, as it were. That is, it is believed that concerns about labor justice should be restricted to the steps prior to work itself: what should be fair, then, are the conditions which permit access to and departure from the occupation. Individuals should be free of choice and of quitting, but nothing is said about the internal aspects of work. This position emphasizes the principles of free choice of occupation, freedom of quitting, and equal opportunity: all of which take place “before” or “after”, rather than “during” work. Call this the *external justice* thesis.
- The fourth position fully acknowledges the need to bring work into the normative domain, and it does so distributively – i.e. including work into the index of the *distribuenda*. The underlying assumption is that work can be “allocated” on a par with other goods. Call this the *distributability* thesis.

The question, thus, is the following: can injustices rooted in work and the division of labor be adequately addressed within a distributive framework? More precisely, the four theses just outlined raise the following concerns:

- First, is the thesis that work is a merely private matter justified? Why should it not be considered a public concern? What problems does work raise to the private/public distinction, if any? Does this dichotomy make sense with respect to work?
- Second, can labor concerns be met by the distribution of other goods? Which goods can be distributed in this way, and why are these goods more appropriate than others?
- Third, is free occupational choice sufficient to respond to the normative questions raised by work and the division of labor? What are the implications of holding this view?
- Finally, is the conceptualization of work as a distributable good tenable? What, if anything, is objectionable to this?

I will argue that the above theses should be rejected for reasons which I will expound in detail in the following chapters, and which I sum up as follows:

- The *personal preference* thesis should be rejected because 1) work cannot be taken as having the same normative weight as personal tastes, since it is embedded in structures and practices which powerfully shape people’s lives, thereby reproducing objectionable inequalities; 2) the category of “preference” is morally solipsistic – i.e. it is exclusively centered on the individual – while work is first of all a social relation and a form of participation in social cooperation; 3) the private/public distinction which justifies the thesis is challenged by the nature of work itself, as crosscutting a number of institutions (from the household to firms and corporations) and thus the boundaries between the two.
- The *derivative* thesis should be rejected because work and the division of labor are discrete realities, not mere sub-cases of income, and thus raise distinctive normative concerns; that is, anti-reductionism and normative differentiation need to be counter-argued in the light of the fact of social differentiation.
- The *external justice* thesis should be rejected for the same reasons as the *derivative* thesis, plus the need for work and its structures to be addressed from the inside. Labor injustice is rooted in norms, practices, structures and social relations that cannot be simply assumed as redressed through income policies.
- The *distributability* thesis should not be rejected but complemented with a nondistributive perspective: that is, work and the division of labor raise *both* distributive and

nondistributive concerns, for they are not fully satisfied by the allocation of income and positions, but involve social relations, norms, structures, practices and organizational cultures that cannot be satisfactorily met only with a distributive logic.

These counter-arguments can be expressed in terms of some basic conditions that are to be met by a conception of labor justice: a *social interdependence condition* (work should be considered as a form of participation to social cooperation in the first place, rather than merely as a private preference); a *normative differentiation condition* (issues of work and the division of labor raise distinct and irreducible normative concerns); an *internal justice condition* (labor justice must be addressed *within* work and its structures, not only externally). I will justify these claims in the following chapters.

The chapter's aim is not to dismiss *en bloc* distributive theories. Other than illustrating these positions and answering these questions, it aims at exploring whether the distributive model may provide useful resources for a conception of labor justice sensitive to inequalities. That is, the discussion will not be restricted to understanding and assessing how labor justice is conceptualized in distributive readings, but it will also aim at identifying what may be retained from these theories for a conception of labor justice.

For this purpose, I will consider some of the most influential distributive models of justice in contemporary philosophy, that may be labelled as follows: *liberal-egalitarian* (John Rawls), *luck-egalitarian socialist* (John Roemer and Richard Arneson), *allocative-libertarian* (Philippe Van Parijs), and *pluralist* (Michael Walzer) distributive models. Of course, these do not exhaust the spectrum of distributive theories, but I have chosen some of the most representative and influential theories⁸. Despite the deep differences between them, they share some background assumptions on what problems a theory of justice should address, and in what ways to do so. Their common aim is to establish norms and guidelines for a fairer distribution of social goods among members of a society. This sort of “background consensus” on how social justice is to be understood justifies their inclusion into a common “paradigm” – that is, a framework of shared methodology and basic assumptions⁹.

In what follows, I will scrutinize each of these models, then discern some basic claims widely shared by these conceptions and finally test them through a “contributive justice test”. I will highlight their strengths and weaknesses with respect to the possibility of thinking of work and the division of labor in terms of justice, and discuss the possible alternative routes that they could have taken. The whole discussion will then lead to an awareness of what is insufficient or inadequate and what should be rescued from the distributive framework for a conception of labor justice.

I will develop these problems over two chapters. Chapter I is devoted to John Rawls' distributive model, because of its significance in the debate on justice and due to the many elements of discussion present in his work on the subject. Chapter II addresses three distinct distributive models: socialist, pluralist, and allocative. The main conclusion of these chapters will be that distributive theories provide necessary, but insufficient resources for labor justice.

⁸ For a recent account of distributive approaches, see Ackerman, B., Alstott, A., and P. Van Parijs (2006).

⁹ The first author referring to theories of distributive justice in the terms of a unified “paradigm” is Iris Marion Young (1990)

Chapter I

Rawls on Work: Reassembling the Puzzle

It has been observed that Rawls' views on work are "something of a puzzle" (Arnold 2012, 95). Rawls addresses work on many occasions, but he never systematically commits himself to the problem in itself. Even if complaints about Rawls' neglect of work are frequent in the literature on the subject (Schwartz 1982; Young 1990), the issue is far from being altogether absent in his work. It might be said that scholars are divided into two groups: those who believe that Rawls' theory can accommodate issues of meaningful work and changes in the organizational structure of work (Freeman 2007; Moriarty 2009; Arnold 2012; Hsieh 2005; 2012; O' Neill 2008), and those who think that it does not, or it cannot (Schwartz 1982; Schwarkheit 1979; Young 1990; 2006; Hasan 2015; Singer 2015)¹⁰. The issue is complicated further by Rawls' rather ambiguous attitude to work. On the whole, it seems that two levels of reasoning can be discerned in his discourse: an explicit level (i), consisting of many passages in which he clearly expresses normative concerns about work and the division of labor, and an implicit level (ii), where the relative ambiguity of some of his concepts seems to leave room for a re-interpretation taking into account labor justice.

However, whether the liberal-egalitarian model of distributive justice may provide us with resources to discern fair from unfair work structures is an open question. I will highlight that in Rawls' writings there is a significant tension between a perfectionist consideration of work, as expressed by the Aristotelian Principle, and a liberal concern, which leads him to restrict the normative gaze to the conditions of "fair access" to work. I will argue that this common trade-off of the liberal-egalitarian model between the ethical meaning of work and social justice is not necessary, and indeed should be abandoned, for it unacceptably excludes work from the scope of justice. I will show that one can uphold a normative approach to work without necessarily embracing a strongly perfectionist perspective.

In order to clarify this, it is necessary to reassemble Rawls' "puzzle on work". As for the explicit register (i), I will search for the "pieces of the puzzle" in:

1. the Aristotelian Principle, and its implications on the division of labor;
2. the index of primary goods, and the ambiguity of some goods with respect to work;
3. the plausibility of applying the difference principle to labor inequalities; and
4. the effects of property-owning democracy on the division of labor.

As for the implicit register (ii), I will search for Rawls' "pieces of the puzzle" in the following concepts:

- Social cooperation;
- The basic structure and social unions;
- The "least advantaged."

Note that each of these elements is not primarily committed to labor justice, but has some implications about it. I will analyze each of them, and arrive at the conclusion that we cannot derive a satisfying conception of labor justice from Rawls' theory of justice, for there is no necessary connection between the normative core of his theory and issues of labor justice.

¹⁰ For an overview of Rawls' work, see Freeman 2007; Maffettone 2010.

Nonetheless, I will also argue that his quite limited commitment to the subject does not exclude possible reinterpretations of his theory in the direction of a stronger commitment.

1. The Aristotelian Principle and the Division of Labor

There are many passages where Rawls explicitly expresses normative considerations on work and the division of labor. For example, in a *Theory of Justice* (1971), he claims that, even if the division of labor cannot (and should not) be suppressed, in a well-ordered society:

No one need be servilely dependent on others and made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility. Each can be offered a variety of tasks so that the different elements of his nature find a suitable expression. (...) The division of labor is overcome not by each becoming complete in himself, but by willing and meaningful work within a just social union of social unions in which all can freely participate as they so incline. (§79)

Here Rawls condemns the most degrading effects of the detailed division of labor in a way that recalls Adam Smith's criticism of the stultified worker in the pins manufacturing industry (1776). The recipe he suggests against the bads of the division of labor – namely *servile dependency*, *monotony* and *routine* – is “variety”. Assuming that variety would be the appropriate response, only half of the bads highlighted would be addressed. Indeed, while providing a response to the “monotonous and routine” character of some occupations, it is not clear how variety would affect the condition of being “servilely dependent on others”. Servile dependency has to do with relationships of power and asymmetry in authority in hierarchical work structures, not only with constraints of economic necessity. Despite its importance, Rawls leaves the question unaddressed. To reformulate this point through the lens of the dimensions of labor justice, while the monotonous and routine character of work affects the contributive dimension, servile dependency has to do with the democratic-political dimension – they involve, then, distinct axes of the problem, and cannot be remedied by responding to only one of them (otherwise, the *derivative* thesis). More broadly, it is not clear whether the idea that the worst aspects of the division of labor are surmountable can be grounded in the overall framework of Rawls' theory of justice. In the rather “vague paragraph” (Schwartz 1982) just quoted, Rawls confines himself to some assertions without justifying them further (see also Moriarty 2009). There is no obvious connection between these assertions and his principles of justice.

However, his thought seems to find some grounding in his reflections on moral psychology. This perspective would entail, according to Rawls, that it is because humans naturally tend to prefer exercising their complex capacities that the worst aspects of the division of labor are condemned. This is what Rawls refers to as the “Aristotelian principle”:

(...) other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity (1971, 426).

The Aristotelian Principle is a psychological fact: people naturally enjoy exercising their capacities, and they do it along a virtual chain of complexity, so that the more the ability is exercised, the more one wishes to advance the chain. These levels of complexity, thus, are relative to the person, not absolute (Rawls 1971, 441-42; Moriarty 2009). This principle

describes a way in which “human nature as we know it” (Rawls 1971, 432) shapes people’s rational life plans (even if, Rawls says, countervailing inclinations are possible). This means that in determining which ends and activities they wish to include in their life plans, people usually make their preferences in accordance with the Aristotelian principle: this would explain why people have preferences for meaningful work, and other “valued activities” (knowledge, creation or contemplation of beautiful objects, etc.). The Aristotelian principle should thus be understood as providing a psychological reason against the degrading effects of the detailed division of labor, which Rawls addresses some paragraphs later in the book. Even if Rawls does not formulate this principle with this exclusive concern in mind, but rather as a general, “basic principle of motivation” (Rawls 1971, 424), and as a “psychological law governing changes in the pattern of our desires” (427), nonetheless he clearly refers to meaningful work as one of the valued activities that it is rational to include in one’s life plans because of the Aristotelian principle. How should this be assessed, with respect to our purposes? Can this be of help for a conception of labor justice?

Indeed, Rawls includes what he calls “the values” of “meaningful work and social cooperation” in the realm of the “human goods”. The problem is that it is a constitutive feature of the human goods that they lie outside of the scope of justice. In this framework, meaningful work is a matter of subjective preferences, personal ends, and judgements of value. Considered in light of the distinction between fairness and the good (and of the priority of the right over the good), the Aristotelian principle injects elements of perfectionism into Rawls’ framework (Freeman 2007, 271; Wall 2015, 19). The author himself acknowledges this when he says that the principle “bears a certain resemblance” to “the ideal notion of self-realization” (Rawls 1971, 431). The most important implication of this is that as a matter of judgement of value and human good, meaningful work lies outside of the realm of justice: as Rawls says, “doing something unjust is not included in the description of human goods” (Rawls 1971, 425). Inscripting himself in the longstanding tradition that dismisses work as a merely private matter (Nozick 1974; Arneson 1987; Kymlicka 2002), in this way Rawls clearly endorses what I have called the *personal preference* thesis. His normative consideration of work, thus, is not one of justice, but one of the good. In other words, Rawls provides us with resources that do not allow us to discern between just and unjust forms of work: what we can say about them is, at most, that they go against what is rational, or even natural, for humans to prefer.

2. Is Work a Primary Good?

These normative considerations on work are mostly comments and notes playing a relatively marginal role, rather than key issues of justice grounded in Rawls’ broader normative apparatus. Thus, let us turn to the core of Rawls’ normative architecture, in order to see whether a more significant commitment to labor justice can be found in his theory.

Rawls describes the primary goods as all-purpose means required by every citizen in order to pursue their rational life plans. It is to them that distributive justice is supposed to apply. Thus, one may ask: is work a primary good? This is not an irrelevant question, for if work is a primary good, it will be subject to the principles of justice and, in particular, to the difference principle, according to which inequalities should be to the greatest benefit of the worst off. Assuming that this line of reasoning is plausible – that is, if work is part of the index of primary goods, as is held by the *distributability* thesis – *then it is subject to the second principle of justice, so*

that inequalities at work would be justified only to the extent that they improve the conditions of the worst-off in the division of labor. This conclusion would be relevant for our purposes, for it would provide a response to the question of how to discern between fair and unfair work structures. But is it justified?

Before exploring the plausibility of this point, it is necessary to first consider the index of primary goods – i.e. the *distribuenda* of justice – as stated in *Justice as Fairness*:

- i) the “basic rights and liberties”;
- ii) “freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities”;
- iii) “powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility”;
- iv) “income and wealth, understood as all-purpose means”; and
- v) “the social bases of self-respect” (Rawls 2001, §17.2).

At a first glance, since it does not appear in this index, one would think that work does not have much to do with the pursuit of one’s life plans. This would sound very disconnected from real people’s lives, as it would from Rawls’ own Aristotelian Principle too. Even if Rawls includes the “free choice of occupation” in the index, what happens once the occupation has hypothetically been chosen, and whether or not the work structures are fair, seems to not be of concern (here we can discern the *external justice* thesis). Rawls thus seems not to agree with the *distributability* thesis.

This becomes clearer still when Rawls points out the reasons for the priority of liberty with respect to the difference principle:

The general level of wealth in society, including the well-being of the least advantaged, depends on people's decisions as to how to lead their lives. The priority of liberty means that we cannot be forced to engage in work that is highly productive in terms of material goods. *What kind of work people do, and how hard they do it, is up to them to decide in light of the various incentives society offers.* (2001, 64 §18.3, emphasis added)

Just as meaningful work belongs to the realm of the good, the most that a theory of justice can say on the subject seems to be that people should be left free to choose their occupations. Once more, the gaze of justice stops “at the door of work”.

However, before drawing the conclusion that work has no place among Rawls’ *distribuenda* of justice, and that unjust labor inequalities cannot be addressed within a Rawlsian framework, one should look more closely at two interesting primary goods:

1. “the powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility” (PPO), and
2. “the social bases of self-respect” (SBS).

A closer investigation of both may open the path for alternative readings. Before discussing them, note that a discussion on the relations between work and primary goods cannot overlook the fact that in *Justice as Fairness* a new primary good, very important to issues of labor justice, comes to the fore: *leisure*. However, I will address this issue later, within a broader discussion on the problem of leisure time in the distributive approach (Chapter IV).

2.1. “Powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility” (PPO)

Can the “mysterious good” (Arnold 2012) of powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility be interpreted as referring to roles and occupations in the division of labor? It is hard to specify the content of this good, for Rawls does not say much on this. Nor is the literature of much help. It is no surprise that, among those in the list, it has been described as “the most neglected primary good” (Arnold 2012, 96). Yet some more precise accounts of this good can be found in Rawls’ writings.

In “Social Unity and Primary Goods”, where Rawls explains the reasons behind the goods of the index, he says that PPO is needed in order “to give scope to various self-governing and social capacities of the self” (Rawls 1999c, 366). In the VIII Lecture of *Political Liberalism*, he also specifies the content of PPO, as involving “powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility in the political and *economic* institutions of the basic structure” (Rawls 2005, 181, emphasis added). The thought that PPO has exclusively to do with *political* institutions is made implausible by the mention here of the *economic* nature of the institutions involved. One may think, thus, that having authority and responsibility in economic institutions – like firms and corporations – is a primary good and, as such, it should be subject to the principles of justice. However, in the article “Fairness to Goodness”, Rawls writes a note that contradicts this statement. He says, “That political and economic power is a primary good I never meant to say; if at certain points the text will bear this interpretation, it needs to be corrected” (1999b, 273, n. 8). Not only, therefore, does PPO appear highly indeterminate in content, it is also presented in a quite inconsistent way.

Let us turn thus to the literature. Whereas Eyal (2005) interprets this good as “political influence”, Freeman argues that “by ‘powers’ Rawls does not mean (...) power in the sense of a capacity to dominate or even have control over others” (2007, 152). Rather, according to Freeman, Rawls refers to “the legal and institutional abilities and prerogatives that attend offices and social positions” (Freeman 2007, 152). This interpretation would be in line with Rawls’ remarks in “Fairness as Goodness”. Rather, Hasan glosses PPO as involving more generally the issue of “how authority is parceled out *vis-à-vis* positions or roles within a differentiated institutional structure” (Hasan 2015, 495). It is possible to reject Eyal’s interpretation by turning to Rawls’ own words: in *Political Liberalism*, as we have said, PPO is involved in economic institutions besides just political ones (Rawls 2005, 181). Therefore, even if Rawls later said it was not the case, in contrast with Eyal’s interpretation, this good does not simply coincide with political influence, for the powers and prerogatives in question also have to do with economic institutions. But let us see how Freeman justifies his interpretation.

Samuel Freeman connects Rawls’ idea of property-owning democracy, and particularly his references to the possibility of work-owned firms, to the primary good of PPO; then, the application of the difference principle to PPO is said to provide a reason for Rawls’ preference of property-owning democracy over welfare-state capitalism. In welfare-state capitalism, as a matter of fact, increased income for the worst off “is not accompanied by their having additional powers and prerogatives in the workplace”, but rather there is the opposite result (Freeman 2007). If PPO is part of the index of primary goods, one should care about the outcomes of the difference principle also with respect to this good. Applying this concern to

Rawls' choice between property-owning democracy and welfare-state capitalism, Freeman remarks that a better economic situation in terms of income would not immediately translate into a better situation in terms of powers and prerogatives at work in welfare-state capitalism. He concludes that "only in a property-owning democracy can the fair and adequate distribution of powers and prerogatives of office for the least advantaged be achieved" (Freeman 2007), as Rawls' reference to Mill's idea of worker-owned firms (Mill 2008 [1848]) in *Justice as Fairness* may justify us to think.

Freeman adds an argument to Rawls' framework in favor of property-owning democracy, by interpreting PPO as consisting of powers and prerogatives in the workplace. Freeman's is, thus, a strong interpretation of PPO in a direction sympathetic to labor justice. While fascinating, this is, however, a rather free interpretation. There is no explicit connection between PPO and property-owning democracy in Rawls' writings. Freeman himself acknowledges that his argument is highly conjectural: "while consistent with, it is not directly implied by what Rawls explicitly says" (2007, 134). Furthermore, as we will see, whether PPO is subject to the difference principle is far from being obvious.

Let us turn to Samuel Arnold, who has proposed a weaker interpretation than Freeman's, and a stronger interpretation than Eyal's. Despite the relative indeterminacy of PPO, Arnold argues that an interpretation that is "Rawlsian in spirit" (2012, 100) can be proposed by looking at the way Rawls describes another good: the social bases of self-respect.

As an "internal attitude", self-respect does not meet the workability test, which does not concern psychological states but social institutions. That is why Rawls includes *the social bases* of self-respect in his list of the primary goods, rather than self-respect itself. This general pattern of argumentation is re-adapted by Arnold to the "mysterious" primary good of PPO. That is, along the lines of Rawls' consideration of the internal resources of self-respect, Arnold proposes to identify the "self-governing and social capacities of the self" Rawls referred to as the "internal resources" of PPO. Following the pattern of argument that Rawls uses for self-respect, powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility can thus be considered as the social bases of these internal resources (Arnold 2012, 98). As mentioned earlier, this interpretation is grounded in a passage where the philosopher explains the reasons behind each primary good of the index. To recall, he says that PPO is needed "to give scope to various *self-governing and social capacities of the self*" (Rawls 1999c, 366). Arnold tries to expand on this idea, by including in the self-governing and social capacities of the self fostered by PPO, the capacities required by "complex work". He claims that such internal resources may be "intelligence and virtuosity" (Arnold 2012, 101). He grounds this idea on research findings on the key role that complex work plays in the development of personality. A famous study by Kohn and Schooler, for instance, demonstrated that:

Job conditions actually do affect personality (...). Jobs that facilitate occupational self-direction increase men's ideational flexibility and promote a self-directed orientation to self and to society; jobs that limit occupational self-direction decrease men's ideational flexibility and promote a conformist orientation to self and to society. (Kohn and Schooler 1982, p. 1281)

Thus, Arnold concludes, self-governing capacities constituting the internal resources of PPO should also include the positive psychological effects related to complex work. He thus reformulates the primary good of PPO as follows:

The social bases of the internal resources of social and self-governing capacities, intelligence, and virtuosity: namely, positions of authority, responsibility, and complexity. (Arnold 2012, 103)

Arnold's interpretation seems better than Eyal's, for it extends his interpretation beyond the political dimension. However, even if it does not have philological ambitions for Rawls' writings, for it aims at being at most "Rawlsian in spirit", his reading seems even more conjectural than Freeman's. It is not directly implied by Rawls' discourse, and generously re-interprets Rawls in the direction of a defense of complex work as a primary good. As a last resort, and as Hasan puts it, "from the fact that PPO clearly has something to do with the distribution of authority, it does not necessarily follow that it concerns meaningful work" (Hasan 2015, 495).

However, it must be noted that when trying to interpret the primary good PPO as referring to economic institutions, Freeman and Arnold are interested in quite different problems. Freeman can be said to be addressing the political-democratic dimension of labor justice. He talks about *powers and prerogatives within the workplace*, explicitly mentioning Rawls' reference to Mill's worker-owned firms. Arnold, by contrast, points to the contributive dimension – that of the nature of the tasks and of meaningful work. He talks about *intelligence and virtuosity as fostered by complex work*. Democracy in the workplace and the meaningfulness of work are different issues, even if it is reasonable to think that they are connected, and even if the implementation of one may have positive effects on the other: after all, a democratic workplace is also one where workers have a say on the tasks and on work quality; and, vice versa, one may argue that taking part in decisions affecting one's work should be seen as a necessary strand of the meaningfulness of work. However, there is no *necessary* connection between them and they refer to qualitatively different problems: that of power and control on the one hand, and the nature of the tasks performed on the other. The first is inherently social, while the second is mostly involved in the individual experience of work. Both, however, require some form of collective involvement.

Given that none of their views provide a strict interpretation of Rawls' reticent references to work, I am not convinced that "complexity" is the best way to address problems of labor justice. One may perform complex tasks and still suffer from unjust labor conditions¹¹. Rather, authority and prerogatives in the workplace seem to provide a more comprehensive standpoint for labor justice. Having a say in one's work conditions, such that one's voice really counts, may also have the outcome of pushing the organization to rethink itself in such a way that the impacts of meaningless work are minimized, and the responsibility for these issues is shared. This idea points to a sort of normative priority of the democratic dimension over others, as a meta-normative requirement for other demands.

Nonetheless, while we can certainly take inspiration from Rawls' thought in order to take a route akin to labor justice, it must be concluded that the author of *A Theory of Justice* does *not* include either fair work structures, meaningful work, or workplace control in the core of his normative concerns, and particularly in the index of primary goods. Conjectures and speculations over the connections between meaningful work and fair work structures, while often consistent with Rawls' own statements, are not implied by Rawls' writings and have no *necessary* connection with his index of primary goods.

¹¹ This is also a criticism that I will address to meaningful work theories later (see Chapter V).

Yet there are reasons to believe that the primary good of PPO actually provides a relevant strand of labor justice, referring to powers and prerogatives in the workplace, however vague and undetermined these notions may be. The question, thus, is: if we assume that powers and prerogatives of office in economic institutions are part of the index of primary goods, then would the principles of justice apply to them? If yes, how? Before answering these questions, I turn to the second primary good which is interesting for our purposes.

2.2. “The social bases of self-respect” (SBS)

The good of the social bases of self-respect may provide a different route. Recall that it is not self-respect as such which is a primary good, but its “social bases”. As noted above, the reason for this precision is that Rawls thinks that the primary goods should pass the workability test – they must be publicly acknowledgeable. As is well-known, Rawls’ theory of justice applies to institutions, not to individuals or to psychological states.

Despite Rawls’ relatively cursory reference to the idea of meaningful work in *A Theory of Justice*, he gets back to the question in his later work, *Political Liberalism* (2005, firstly published in 1993). In the introduction of the book, he points to the institutions that are necessary for social stability – that is, for preventing “excessive inequalities”. After mentioning measures like the public financing of political elections, equal opportunities in training and education, and a decent distribution of income and wealth, he points to “the opportunity for meaningful work and occupation”, which requires “society as an employer of last resort” (Rawls 2005, lix). In this account, meaningful work is described as necessary for citizens’ self-respect, and also for providing them with a “sense that they are members of society and not simply caught in it” (Rawls 2005, lix). Self-respect and social cohesion now appear to constitute justifications for the claim that meaningful work is necessary for social stability. Significantly, some years later the first publication of *Political Liberalism* (1993) he repeats this passage in *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999a, 50) in identical shape.

Note that with these words, Rawls again connects meaningful work with psychological considerations. This time the stress is on self-respect and social integration. On the one hand, meaningful work is said to foster a feeling of inclusion, a sense of being an integral part of society. On the other hand, the lack of opportunities for meaningful work is said to be “destructive” of one’s self-respect.

The social bases of self-respect, as we have seen, constitute a fundamental (and “perhaps the most important”) primary good. Thus, are we allowed to think that meaningful work counts as a social basis of self-respect, and that it is to be considered as a primary good in itself? Before addressing this point, let us consider the concept of self-respect in order to better clarify its meaning.

In Rawls’ account, self-respect is necessary for two reasons: for the feeling that one’s plans of life are worth pursuing, and for the sense of confidence in one’s ability to pursue these plans, such that without self-respect, “nothing may seem worth doing” (Rawls 1971, 440). The sense of our own worth is essentially grounded on two circumstances: having a rational plan of life that satisfies the Aristotelian Principle, and finding oneself appreciated by one’s associates (1971, 440). I do not enter here into the controversy of the overlap, and perhaps confusion, between self-respect and self-esteem in Rawls’ account (Sachs 1981; Darwall 1977). What interests me here is the connection between self-respect and the Aristotelian Principle: we

become more confident in our own worth when our abilities are “fully realized and organized in ways of suitable complexity and refinement”. The “companion effect” of this, is that “others confirm and take pleasure in what we do” (Rawls 1971, 440). Being deprived of others’ confirmation of ourselves, the belief in our own worth is hard to be maintained: this is what is generally referred to as “recognition”. As an essential component of self-respect, the Aristotelian Principle which shapes people’s life plans seems thus to work as the “hidden side” of self-respect.

To sum up: in his later works, Rawls seems to acknowledge that work should play a more important role than it did in his earlier writings. In *Political Liberalism* he states that the lack of opportunities for meaningful work negatively affects self-respect and social cohesion. For this reason, society should be an “employer of last resort”. However, since Rawls’ level of explicit commitment to this idea within the broader normative framework is not clear, one should look for further elements to justify these cursory claims. Exploring the reasons for the importance given to the good of the social bases of self-respect, one ends up finding the Aristotelian Principle: namely, the idea that a person’s belief in their own worth cannot be decoupled from the development of their capacities, which are to be confirmed by valued associates. In this light, the Aristotelian Principle, which explains people’s preferences for meaningful work, may be considered as the hidden aspect of the (perhaps) most important primary good, self-respect. It follows that meaningless work, being routine and requiring few skills, does not satisfy the Aristotelian Principle – as a result, it cannot be said to support one’s self-respect (Moriarty 2009, 450).

However, this connection between the idea of self-respect and meaningful work is far from being a fully-fledged commitment to an idea of labor justice. Rawls appears to be cautious and perhaps reticent on the subject. His caution may be due to an apparent need not to claim that meaningful work *is* the social basis for self-respect *tout court*. In fact, in his account, it is not meaningful work itself, but rather the *opportunities* for meaningful work that are considered. After all, people may find sources for self-respect outside of meaningful work, such as by playing football (see also Moriarty 2009). This is hardly a contestable claim.

The normative status of meaningful work in Rawls’ architecture is thus unclear. On the one hand, Rawls seems to take this idea as especially relevant, for the lack of opportunities for meaningful work is said to harm self-respect and social cohesion. On the other hand, there is no necessary connection between meaningful work and the social bases of self-respect, and thus it cannot be simply taken as part of the index of primary goods. In Hasan’s words, “Rawlsian self-respect affords no necessary priority to the work relation” (Hasan 2015, 491).

From these aspects of the Rawlsian architecture considered hitherto, we cannot conclude that meaningful work *is* a primary good. And if meaningful work is not part of that index, then it is not subject to the principles of justice. What we can say is that opportunities for meaningful work are somewhat essential to self-respect, but not necessary. They have no special priority over other kinds of social bases of self-respect.

Therefore both PPO and SBS cannot be said to justify a positive answer to our initial question, “is work a primary good?”. Nonetheless, including work among the primary goods is not necessarily the only way to express concerns for labor justice. And it is true that we can observe an evolution in Rawls’ commitment to the subject of work¹². This view seems to be

¹² As Moriarty observes, “late in his career, Rawls warmed to the idea that a theory of justice should say something substantive about the labor process.” (Moriarty 2009, 459)

supported by what Rawls himself acknowledges on the subject of workplace democracy in his later work: “*Theory* leaves aside for the most part the question of the claims of democracy in the firm and the workplace” (Rawls 2005, xxviii).

As a last resort, considering the index of primary goods, one again finds the double register typical of Rawls’ ambiguous remarks on the subject. The explicit register accounts for the idea of free occupational choice. The implicit register, as we have seen, involves a possible but not unequivocal commitment to the idea of labor justice in the two primary goods, PPO and SBS. On the whole, a close observation of the index of primary goods does not allow us to draw positive conclusions on Rawls’ commitment to labor justice, for free occupational choice provides us with relatively few resources for these purposes. It accounts for an *external justice* conception. Moreover, it expresses a commitment to freedom, which is a very common concern when dealing with work on a normative basis, while a problematization in terms of equality is hardly found. While the principles of justice are certainly concerned with problems of inequality – as shown by the difference principle – such a concern seems not to apply to work (free occupational choice partakes of the first principle). What the good of free occupational choice allows is at most an external conception of “fair access” to labor.

As for the goods of PPO and SBS, we have seen that their connection to the structures of work and meaningful work is relatively weak, and, in any case, not necessary in Rawls’ account. It is thus true that we reach a “dead end” when getting close to the responses Rawls gives to these key questions (Singer 2015). Efforts which aim at finding something more in Rawls’ theory are not compelling. Concerns for work are not part of the core of his theory of justice. Rather, Rawls seems to assume that fair work structures ‘spontaneously’ result from the correct implementation of his distributive principles (*derivative* thesis). As Hasan has stressed, Rawls “merely expresses the hope” that fair work is “a consequence of just institutions” (Hasan 2015, 478). This may be called a ‘ripple effect’ conception of labor justice, which is distinctive also of other distributive models (as we shall see in Chapter II with respect to Universal Basic Income).

2.3. “Good” or “Just” Work?

Looking at Rawls’ theory through the prism of work, one finds an interesting tension. The discussion has shown that there is a tension in his normative commitment to work between a perfectionist account (Aristotelian principle) and a liberal concern (free occupational choice). Let us call them the “perfectionist” and “liberal” strands. The perfectionist strand emerges when Rawls considers the internal nature of work – meaningful work is conceived of as a “value” with a connection to the Aristotelian principle. The internal features of work are addressed mostly through psychological considerations concerning humans’ natural preference for complexity, as well as the need to be confirmed by others, which is vital to self-respect. If this sphere involves judgements of value and competing ends, then clearly considerations of justice do not apply to work.

The liberal strand, by contrast, is committed to labor justice in terms of freedom in the choice of occupation (primary good) and in terms of fair equal opportunities (second principle of justice). Such a perspective stops at the door of work. The internal characteristics of work and of labor structures are not liable to justice claims. This strand does not aim to change the internal organization of the workplace, the structure of the division of labor, to improve work

relations, or to make norms and processes of cooperation fairer. Instead of transforming work and its structures, the liberal strand calls for a merely external commitment to work, for its primary concern is to provide freedom of choice to individuals. This is notwithstanding the many structural constraints that make freedom of occupational choice rather problematic. What the liberal strand offers here is a general commitment to provide opportunities to succeed in the labor market – or negatively, to ensure that no one be forced into an occupation.

Given the priority of the right over the good, the tension between the perfectionist and the liberal strands on work (and the difficulty in surmounting it) may explain Rawls' reticence on the subject. Whilst he seems to be aware of the need to give greater importance to work (as he explicitly acknowledges in Rawls 2005, lix), concerns for pluralism and the priority of the right appear to be theoretical constraints preventing him from pursuing this goal. This leaves us without resources to discern between fair and unfair work. The most that we can say within a Rawlsian framework is that the *conditions of access* are to be made fair, in terms of freedom of choice and fair equal opportunities. No efforts to transform work and the division of labor are thus required by justice, besides a relatively cursory concern for task variety at work (see §1 above).

Note that the perfectionist and liberal strands have something in common. Both of them assume that concerns about work can be met by the category of private preference. They share this underlying idea in two different ways. The perfectionist strand considers work concerns as a matter for individual psychology, reserving them for the field of personal judgements of value. The liberal strand is interested in preserving freedom, both as freedom of occupational choice and as freedom from centralized constraints: it is up to the individuals to choose what work they do. In both cases, regardless of the perspective one embraces, *as private issues, work and the division of labor lie outside the scope of justice*.

Note that the principle of free occupational choice is significantly different from that of freedom of choosing *whether* working at all. Most liberals – including Rawls – argue against the latter, for this would undermine the principle of reciprocity; while this is not the case of Philippe Van Parijs. Thus, there is here a significant tension between claims freedom and claims to obligation to work: one should be free to choose her work, and yet should not be free of whether working at all¹³. As Beate Roessler has argued, this accounts for a “theoretical self-contradiction” in liberal thought (2012, see Chapter V).

3. The Difference Principle: What About Labor Inequalities?

It is commonplace to consider the inequalities that come under the scope of the difference principle as exclusively concerning wealth and income. But it seems that this restriction of the scope of the difference principle lacks justification. Indeed, Rawls talks about “*socio-economic inequalities*” (emphasis added), and as shown earlier, his index of primary goods shows broader commitments than just income (Freeman 2007; O'Neill 2012, 91). Thus, a question comes to mind: would a wider extension of this principle, taking into account work structures and contributive inequality, be justified? And if so, how should this be understood?

Let us first turn to the revised formulation of the second principle in *Justice as Fairness*:

¹³ For an illuminating development of this point, see Stanczyk 2012.

Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle) (Rawls 2001, §13).

The first strand of the second principle is that of fair equality of opportunity (FEO), which is in a position of “lexical priority” over the difference principle (DP). That is, in case of conflict, FEO prevails over DP. Both have some relevance with respect to work. (i) FEO determines what should happen “before” work, at the stage of access, as in the *external justice* thesis. (ii) By contrast, DP is a more demanding principle, for it discriminates between acceptable and unacceptable inequalities. Its connection with work structures and meaningful work is far from obvious. (i) and (ii) both express some egalitarian commitment, whereas the idea of free occupational choice and the first principle of justice are centered on the idea of freedom. Let us explore them in detail.

(i) The idea of equal opportunities is very commonly raised when it comes to issues of justice related to work. It is probably the most successful and shared normative idea on the subject. What should be done, it is often said, is to ensure that all compete on an equal basis for desired positions. Yet, Rawls’ idea aims to be a bit more demanding. Even if he acknowledges that FEO is “a difficult and not altogether clear idea” (Rawls 2001, 43), on the whole, by FEO he means that “public offices and social positions be open” not merely in a formal sense (like in the “careers open to talents” view), “but that all should have a fair chance to attain them” (Rawls 2001, 43). This means that people with the same levels of endowments – i.e. talents and abilities – and the same willingness to use them, should have equal chances to succeed regardless of their social class (Rawls 2001, 43). Interestingly, Rawls does not mention here gender, race, age, or nationality, as parts of that “regardless”. He seems to be exclusively interested in social class, neglecting inequalities that are reproduced through status and power inequalities embedded in structures other than class. I will address this problem later in more detail (Chapter IV). For now, it is sufficient to note that Rawls’ concerns on work as expressed in FEO aim to provide chances to access positions, preventing discrimination due to one’s economic condition. Like the idea of free choice of occupation, the normative concern here stops “at the door of work”; unlike that idea, it introduces some faint concern for equality.

(ii) However, even in the “fair” system of equal opportunity, labor inequality is very likely to persist. After all, the FEO system leaves unaddressed what happens in the division of labor and in hierarchical work structures (see also Gomberg 2007). Thus it may be asked: does the difference principle allow for a more demanding view? Can the difference principle be applied to work structures, providing us with normative tools to discern between fair and unfair forms of the division of labor? In other words, how would a “contributive” interpretation of the difference principle – hereafter termed the *contributive difference principle* – work? I will use the term “contributive” in order to distinguish it from the “distributive” reading of the DP.

In order to explore this possibility, we must leave aside the doubts expressed so far and, for the sake of the argument, assume that work is effectively part of the index of the primary goods. Clearly, this leads us far from Rawls’ explicit writings. We are asking whether the difference principle may be meaningfully applied to the structures of work, pursuing a conceptual exploration rather than a strict philological interpretation.

Let us thus address the question by considering both hypotheses discussed above:

1. that opportunities for meaningful work are part of the social bases of self-respect, and
2. that the primary good of powers and prerogatives of offices in political and economic institutions does refer to work structures.

Let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that the hypotheses refer respectively to *meaningful work* and to the *worker's position in labor structures*. In both cases, one should clarify what the nature of the “greatest benefit” due to the least-advantaged would be. Note that, besides assessing the role played by work in distributive models, the aim of this chapter is to determine whether these models may provide resources for a conception of labor justice. Thus, I am not committed to any view about whether or not Rawls would agree with this extension of the difference principle, but am interested in the possible development of his ideas in the direction of labor justice.

3.1. *A contributive interpretation of the difference principle/1. Meaningful work as a social basis of self-respect*

In the first hypothesis, having assumed that opportunities for meaningful work are part of the social basis of self-respect and thus a fully-fledged primary good, the difference principle requires that inequalities in the opportunities for meaningful work be such that they go to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged in terms of self-respect. This would mean that those with the most opportunities for meaningful work enjoy these greater opportunities in such a way that the least advantaged maximally benefit in some way from this inequality. Would this make sense? In what sense could those with meaningless work benefit from the meaningful work of the most advantaged, in terms of self-respect? This question is complicated by two factors.

First, Rawls never specifies what he means by “meaningful work”. However, from the elements discussed so far, one may infer that meaningful work is work with a relative degree of complexity (as required by the Aristotelian Principle), variety, and characterized by some degree of self-direction, as opposed to servile dependency (Rawls 1971, §79).

The second difficulty is that it is far from obvious that the primary good of the social bases of self-respect, even assuming that it includes meaningful work, falls under the second principle. What would it mean for inequalities in self-respect to be acceptable only insofar as they benefit the worst-off? Self-respect does not allow degrees. Perhaps more reasonably, self-respect – and its social bases – fall under the first principle, that of equal freedoms, rather than under the difference principle (see also Moriarty 2009; Hasan 2015):

The self-respect that comes from being treated as an equal moral subject falls under the first principle, whereas the self-esteem that stems from having one's capacities valued in a specific institutional arena falls under the second, which is why access to institutions that provide this form of recognition might be distributed so as to favor the least advantaged. (Hasan 2015, 496)

Hasan grounds this assertion in a distinction between two internal notions of self-respect (although Rawls does not discern between them): while the sense of one's worth is accepted as *self-respect*, having one's worth confirmed by others is cast as *self-esteem*. In the light of this, according to Hasan, while self-respect is subject to fair equality of opportunity, self-esteem is subject to the difference principle. This does not seem particularly compelling, for the simple reason that self-respect and self-esteem can hardly be considered as quantitative goods: rather,

they concern the sphere of social relations and their qualities. By contrast, the difference principle has to do with *quantitative differences*. Rawls has by-passed this problem by including in the index of primary goods not self-respect as such, but its “social bases”. Additionally, meaningful work may be considered as a qualitative issue: after all, the definition provided – various, complex and self-directed work – has to do with the *qualitative* nature of the tasks performed. Can these qualitative characteristics of work be quantitatively “allocated”? I leave the question open, and return to the quantitative features of the distributive approach in Chapter II.

Turning back to the question of whether inequalities in meaningful work can go to the benefit of the worst off, it must be said that this sounds like a strange idea. It is hard to see in what way the meaningful work of some may benefit others with meaningless work in terms of self-respect. It is hard to see how the inequalities enjoyed by those that André Gorz has labelled the “labor aristocracy” (Gorz 2004; see also Sennett 1999), may improve the situation of the precarious, the gig, the dirty workers, the exploited, those suffering from occupational segregation and so forth in terms of their self-respect. That is, if one looks at contributive inequality, there seems to be something like a zero-sum game. Note that these types of workers are often blamed for their alleged incapacity to find a job, and thus suffer from stigmatization with negative effects to their self-respect (for, as we have seen, a strand of self-respect lies in others’ confirmation of our own worth). The contributive inequality between the elite of meaningful workers and the mass of the contributively disadvantaged is such that it is truly hard to see in what sense this may go to the greatest benefit of the latter. Even if this were possible, it is difficult to see how.

Thus at this point we have two possibilities. 1) If there is no way in which the unequal distribution of opportunities for meaningful work can go to the benefit of the worst-off in terms of self-respect, then *a fortiori* such inequality is not justified and should be rejected by the difference principle. That is, the difference principle may provide the ground for a critical stance against contributive inequality (here intended as unequal prospects for meaningful work as a means for self-respect). 2) Otherwise, we may conjecture the following: such inequality may be to the greatest benefit of the worst-off if those that enjoy meaningful work play some *active* role in improving the working conditions of the worst off – i.e. in making their work more meaningful. Suppose, for instance, that they can take charge of the mindless tasks. The sense in which inequality in meaningfulness may be justified in this case would be that those performing meaningful work share the mindless tasks reserved for the least advantaged, so that the labor burden of those at the lowest rung of the ladder would be lightened. This would have an effect in terms of self-respect in that such shared contributive responsibilities would be acknowledged as a public responsibility, and not as a stigmatizing charge that society selectively attributes to the least advantaged (see also Walzer 1983, chap. 6; Gomberg 2007; Chapter V in this thesis). While the widely accepted interpretation of the *distributive difference principle* requires the better off to take some responsibilities in terms of income redistribution – namely by paying taxes in such a way that the worst off indirectly see their economic condition improve – the *contributive* interpretation of the *difference principle* would ask more of them: i.e. to actively take responsibility for the meaningless work currently reserved for other groups in the division of labor. Such responsibility would affect the sphere of *doing*, rather than of *having*.

However, this second possibility is a bit of a stretch. First, in the possible reading proposed, it is not *inequality in itself* that goes to the benefit of the worst-off. That some people have the best jobs does not itself improve the condition of those with the worst. Second, we were previously considering the *opportunities* for meaningful work, not meaningful work in itself. The second possibility is too strong, and unjustified. Third, leaving aside questions of feasibility and the doubtful connection between inequality and the improvement of the conditions of the worst-off in this case, the second possibility would be problematic in that it would be in tension with the good of the free choice of occupation: the liberal concern that “what kind of work people do, and how hard they do it, is up to them to decide in light of the various incentives society offers” (Rawls 2001, 64). That is, there would be a conflict between the requirements of the *contributive difference principle* and the idea of *free occupational choice*: for the lexical priority of freedom over equality, free occupational choice would prevail. Thus we would not be allowed to enter the contributive territory envisaging other responses such as task sharing. Therefore, from a Rawlsian perspective, the second possibility should be rejected.

In an alternative reading, the sense that such an idea may have is, once again, one of income redistribution: namely, that those benefiting from meaningful work are paid better than others, and thus are in a position to pay more taxes that can be redistributed to the greatest advantage of the worst-off in the division of labor. However, such an idea has at least two problems. First, there is no obvious connection between the level of pay and the degree of meaningfulness of the job. Nor it is obvious that it is desirable that there be: rather, it would be reasonable to think that those with meaningless but socially necessary jobs should be remunerated more, in order to compensate them for their deadening jobs or to make these undesired jobs more attractive (Walzer 1983). Second, assuming that there is such a connection, this would not take us far, for the simple reason that we would still be within the realm of the *distributive* interpretation of the difference principle, with the common concern of income and wealth that we aimed to surmount. In this way we would continue to overlook the problems of work and occupational inequalities considered *in themselves*, as required by the normative differentiation condition.

In conclusion, the first possible contributive interpretation of the difference principle looks more plausible than the second, and it provides us with an objection to contributive inequality in terms of unequal opportunities for meaningful work as a means to self-respect. *Given that there is no way in which inequality in the opportunities for meaningful work can go to the benefit of the worst-off (that is, in the contributive interpretation, to those with meaningless work), then such inequality is not justified and is objectionable by virtue of the contributive interpretation of the difference principle.*

However, recall that this conclusion is acceptable *as long as* the premise that meaningful work is part of the index of primary goods is tenable. Given that this is far from obvious, as I have shown earlier, one cannot conclude that this result fits in Rawls’ theory. Therefore I point to this conclusion as a way of suggesting some unaccomplished potentialities of the difference principle with respect to work structures and labor justice. On this view, a contributive interpretation of the difference principle may allow us to criticize contributive inequality.

3.2. *A contributive interpretation of the difference principle/2. Powers and prerogatives of positions of office and authority in political and economic institutions*

Let us turn to the other hypothesis. The way in which the two principles of justice, and particularly the difference principle, affect the good of powers and prerogatives of office and authority (PPO) is not explicitly addressed by Rawls. Whereas Arnold and Freeman attempt to apply the difference principle to this good (Freeman 2007; Arnold 2012), Hasan argues that PPO “collapses” into the first strand of the second principle, that is, into fair equality of opportunity, which has priority over the difference principle (Hasan 2015).

According to Hasan, PPO lies outside of the scope of the difference principle for there is “little evidence” of the contrary (Hasan 2015, 496; Arnold 2012, 104). Hasan grounds his claim on a passage from the revised edition of *A Theory of Justice* which, in my view, seems to point to a quite different conclusion:

The second principle applies (...) to the distribution of income and wealth *and to the design of organizations* that make use of differences in authority and responsibility. While the distribution of wealth and income need not be equal, it must be to everyone’s advantage, and at the same time, *positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all*. One applies the second principle by holding positions open, *and then, subject to this constraint, arranges social and economic inequalities so that everyone benefits*. (Rawls 2009, 53, emphasis added)

In Hasan’s view, if PPO falls under the first strand of the second principle (FEO), this would imply “equalizing access to meaningful jobs rather than to the reconstruction of jobs so that all have both more and less meaningful components” (Hasan 2015, 497). That is, PPO would merely specify the idea of fair equality of opportunity, and thus in fact work as a complement to the primary good of free occupational choice. PPO, then, would not take us much farther than the usual *external justice* thesis.

However, Hasan overlooks an important strand of the passage quoted. Rawls does not merely re-state the *external justice* view here, restricting his concerns to the problem of access and FEO. Rather, he goes beyond problems of fair access to work. Importantly, he adds that the “design of organizations” characterized by different levels of authority is subject to the second principle. Thus his concern is not restricted to the problem of access to meaningful work in conditions of FEO: the passage clearly addresses the problem of inequalities *within* work organizations as being subject to the difference principle. While “holding positions open” has to do with FEO, the idea that “*subject to this constraint, [one] arranges social and economic inequalities so that everyone benefits*” clearly has to do with the difference principle (even if, here, it is not at the worst-off that we are concentrating on, but “everyone”). Thus unlike Hasan, I do think that there is evidence that PPO falls under the difference principle. I agree that there is no evidence that *meaningful work* falls under the difference principle, but this is a quite different problem.

In his argumentation, Hasan seems to shift from PPO to meaningful work and vice versa in a way that seems to me to be unjustified, as if they were the same thing. PPO refers to prerogatives and powers within economic and political institutions (what I have called the political-democratic dimension of labor justice). Meaningful work has to do with complex, various, and self-directed work (what I have called the contributive dimension of labor justice). Both have important implications for labor justice. However, they should not be confused. For Hasan, DP pertains to the design of organizations in the sense that “positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all”. Everything therefore hangs on what it means to be ‘accessible to all’” (Hasan 2015, 497). But this neglects the second half of the passage quoted.

Besides the concern with opportunities being accessible to all, there is an explicit concern with inequalities in the design of organizations. The passage just quoted is clear, even if it is not very specific and one must speculate about the nature of the advantage mentioned. Moreover, meaningful work is not the only issue at stake in labor justice. Labor justice also has to do with work structures, democratic decision-making, and labor relations among other things. Restricting the problem to meaningful work leads to an underestimation of the implications that the difference principle may have for labor justice.

Therefore, whereas Rawls' commitment to these issues should not be exaggerated, they should at the same time not be underestimated. While I agree with Hasan that the difference principle seems to not affect the internal dimensions of work, *still there are reasons to think that it may have important implications with respect to unequal work structures* – it is to them, as the passage just mentioned clearly states, that the difference principle applies.

Thus, what would it mean for inequalities of powers and prerogatives of office to be acceptable only insofar as they go to the greatest benefit of the worst-off?¹⁴ What would be the nature of this 'greatest benefit', if we are to go beyond focusing only on income and wealth?

An typical response to these questions may lie in the increased productivity resulting from a hierarchical division of labor, where some take decisions and others execute tasks (call this the *efficiency* hypothesis). This would mean that if some have more powers and prerogatives in the workplace, this would be of benefit to productivity, which in turn would bring about increased profits and thereby indirect benefit of workers' wages and occupational security. This is indeed a widespread managerial argument. Thus the difference principle would imply that such increased profits resulting from the alleged efficiency of a hierarchical labor structure would go to the benefit of the worst-off in such a way that the workers would be better remunerated or receive better services, thereby benefiting from the inequality of the labor structure.

However, the *efficiency* hypothesis is contestable. There is a wealth of literature contesting the idea that hierarchical work structures and asymmetry in authority in the workplace are necessary for productivity (Marglin 1974; Johnson and Whyte 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1993); indeed, there is no evidence that alternative organizational structures would fail by virtue of their non-hierarchical character. From the fact that some have more power than others, it is hard to see a different way in which this may go to the benefit of the workers. Therefore, it seems that we can arrive at a similar conclusion: if inequalities in prerogatives and powers in economic institutions are not to the greatest benefit of the worst off, they are not justified by the difference principle.

In conclusion, as determined earlier, the difference principle cannot be said to apply to meaningful work, for the opportunities for meaningful work are not a necessary part of the social bases of self-respect. Likewise, although the reference to powers and prerogatives of office in the workplace is not uncontroversial, there may be reasons that may favor such an interpretation. A contributive interpretation of the difference principle, *if plausible*, would reject excessive inequalities in opportunities for meaningful work and in powers and prerogatives in the workplace. If they were subject to the principle, then we could conclude that excessive inequalities in work are unjust. However, this connection is far from explicit in Rawls' writings.

¹⁴ Indeed, note that in the formulation quoted earlier, those who benefit from the DP are not merely "the worst off" but "everyone".

3.3. *Why Inequality Matters? Why Labor Inequality Does Not Matter?*

The discussion on the difference principle, which is the principle committed to inequality, has shown that its application to unequal work structures is not a relevant part of Rawls' concerns. Therefore, it must be concluded that except from the idea of fair equality of opportunity, Rawls' references to work are essentially conceptualized in terms of *freedom*.

Furthermore, the discussion on the problem of social unions in the next paragraphs will make it clear that the extension of the difference principle to work structures would be in tension with Rawls' exclusion of work organizations from the basic structure. Thus, within his framework, there is little room for addressing work in terms of *equality*. As I will show, there are nevertheless Rawlsian reasons to address unequal work structures, because they can be seen as related to social stability, about which he cares a great deal. Yet, that remains a marginal remark, not substantiated by Rawls' core normative apparatus. As for fair equal opportunity, which is to be intended in terms of real chances to attain the desired positions, it cannot be intended as affecting unequal work structures, for it is restricted to the "before" of work, as in the *external justice* thesis.

However, such a lack of tools for addressing unequal work is in tension not only with Rawls' affirmations on social stability, as I will show shortly, but also with Rawls' claims about the normative relevance of equality. This is relevant for our purposes with respect to equality in labor structures and the multidimensional conception of justice. In the paragraph that Rawls devotes to the concept of equality in *Justice as Fairness* (2001 §39, 130), he appears to be sensitive and well committed to the problem. Consider this passage: "Justice as fairness is an egalitarian view, but in what way? There are many kinds of equality and many reasons for being concerned with it" (Rawls 2001, 130). Note that this typology of the possible objections to inequality clearly recalls Thomas Scanlon's work (2000; 2018).

The first reason that he provides is that "all should have at least enough to meet their basic needs". To be wrong is thus not inequality *in itself*; but harms like hunger and treatable illness associated with it; inequality that allows some to meet their less urgent needs, while leaving the fundamental needs of others unmet, is thus to be deemed unfair. The second reason for which social and economic inequalities should be contained is domination, because law and property can be used together to ensure a dominant position over others, thus raising concerns of equality. A third reason, which is "closer to what is wrong with inequality in itself" (Rawls 2001, 131), has to do with social status: those of lower status are encouraged to be viewed as inferior, so that behaviors of deference, servility and arrogance follow. The former two reasons concern the undesirable consequences of economic and social inequalities, but not the very reasons why they are wrong in themselves. The inherent wrong is highlighted by the concept of social status, which presupposes a hierarchy where, clearly, the highest rank is by definition accessible only to some.

Rawls acknowledges that the inherent positional character of status is such that it supposes a situation where some are superior and others inferior. Those at the top positions should earn their position, whereas "fixed status ascribed by birth, or by gender or race, is particularly odious" (Rawls 2001, 131)¹⁵. From this discussion, Rawls draws the relatively weak conclusion

¹⁵ Finally, Rawls argues that some kind of inequality is even a condition for economic and political justice; it is the case of competitive markets and political elections.

that equal citizenship is a way to equalize the status of all “as free and equal persons” (2001, 132). Yet the complex social nature of status is not such that it can be distributed by an act of the state. This is true in general, but *a fortiori* holds when it comes to labor justice. Indeed, citizenship can co-exist with the most odious forms of unequal division of labor. While citizenship can be of help in improving the conditions of migrant workers – the so-called “guest workers” – it does not go as far as to fix by itself the problem of unequal status within the ladder of labor prestige. Some workers are less valued than others, and this is independent to the quality of their contributions. Rather, they are less valued because of the cultural values attached to the positions that they occupy in the hierarchies of work and prestige (Hughes 2017 [1958]; 1962; 1974; Ridgeway 2014; Chapter IV in this thesis). Dirty workers and care workers, for instance, generally suffer from lower social status even if they are fully-fledged citizens.

The perspective of work thus makes clear the stark insufficiency of citizenship as a remedy to status inequality which, as Rawls argues, is wrong in itself. Of course, this should not lead to an underestimation of the value of citizenship in improving workers’ conditions, especially for migrant workers. However, Rawls should not have been satisfied with citizenship when addressing the problem of status inequality: rather, he should have devoted the resources of his theory towards a more systematic commitment to labor justice. After all, work is a crucial means for the reproduction of status inequalities – consider, for instance, professionalism and what Walzer calls “the insolence of the office”, along with the stigmatization of dirty workers who perform socially necessary tasks, not to mention women’s overcharge of housework, which is by no means acknowledged as “work”, and even not seen at all (Federici 1975; 2012; Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa 1999; Bhattacharaya 2017). These relational, status-related problems will be addressed in detail in Chapter IV.

In conclusion, if Rawls asks himself the reasons for which inequality matters, I turn his question back by asking for the reasons for which labor inequalities do not matter. This question is relevant in the light of Rawls’ own statements concerning domination and social status, which are both primarily involved in labor inequalities: work is one of the primary places where authority is exerted and where hierarchies of prestige powerfully shape people’s lives (Anderson 2017), while work structures continuously reproduce such status inequalities (Hughes 2017 [1958]; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; 2014; Ridgeway 2014; Ridgeway et al. 2009).

4. Work in the Property-Owning Democracy

In the last few years, debates on Rawls’ theory of justice have come to stress the most egalitarian aspects of his thought, paying particular attention to the idea of property-owning democracy as the best institutional realization of the principles of justice. A wide discussion on the underestimated radical implications of these ideas has followed (O’Neill 2008a; Williamson 2009; O’Neill and Williamson 2012; Edmundson 2017). This debate is mostly focused on issues of property, as it is common in the distributive approach. Indeed, the reorganization of property that Rawls advocates in *Justice as Fairness* (2001) might have some relevant implications on work, and it may open the path to results more sympathetic to labor justice concerns. Is this the case?

Property-owning democracy (hereafter POD) is an idea initially proposed by the economist James Meade (2013 [1964]). Rawls describes POD as the dispersion of private

productive assets among the members of society, aimed at preventing their concentration in few hands¹⁶. Note that POD does not do away altogether with private control of capital: rather, it advocates a wide distribution of capital.

The need to prevent monopolistic accumulation is essential to Rawls' support of POD, and of what he labels "liberal socialism" (LS), over other competing institutional possibilities, namely: "*laissez-faire* capitalism", "welfare-state capitalism", and "state socialism"¹⁷. POD aims to prevent inequalities in productive assets – "real capital" and "human capital" – for they undermine "the fair value of the political liberties" – that is, they affect equality in the political process and allow those with more assets to exercise more political influence (Rawls 2001). Assets are otherwise at risk of accumulating in few hands, and can undermine equal relationships among citizens by stigmatizing those who depend on the state for their income.

4.1. *Property-Owning Democracy versus Welfare-State Capitalism*

Let us take a look at the distinction most discussed by Rawls: that between welfare-state capitalism and POD. Whereas welfare-state capitalism "permits a small class to have a near monopoly of the means of production", POD prevents such a monopoly not by redistributing income "at the end of each period", as welfare-state capitalism does, but by "ensuring a widespread ownership of *productive assets and human capital* (that is, education and trained skills) at the beginning of each period" (Rawls 2001, 139, emphasis added). Importantly, this passage specifies the nature of the capital that POD will distribute, which is not merely economic. Economic capital and cultural capital, to rephrase them in a Bourdieusian language, are both subject to the politics of widespread distribution under POD¹⁸. Interestingly, most debates on POD have focused almost exclusively on economic capital, while the relationship between human capital and POD has been largely overlooked.

In the choice between POD and welfare-state capitalism, it seems that, once again, the primary good of self-respect plays a key role, along with the idea of social and economic equality (Rawls 2001, 139 ff.). It is because people are equal and are equally owed self-respect that the monopolistic concentration of capital ownership should be replaced by capital dispersal. Moreover, it is because welfare programs cannot guarantee social and economic equality as well as self-respect that they do not meet the requirements of justice, given that those who benefit from welfare programs are identified as "needy" and stigmatized. In Rawls' view, an alternative institutional configuration should be framed in terms of reciprocity and political justice, not charity or targeted assistance. No one should be put into the position of having to demand assistance. Thus the aim of POD is not merely that of preventing a group of people from falling under a certain minimum standard of decent life, like in welfare-state capitalism, for this creates an "underclass" of depressed and discouraged people which undermines social cohesion (Rawls 2001, 140). Rather, what is to be ensured is reciprocity and political justice for self-respect:

¹⁶ "The background institutions of property-owning democracy work to disperse the ownership of wealth and capital, and thus to prevent a small part of society from controlling the economy, and indirectly, the political life as well" (Rawls 2001, 139).

¹⁷ State socialism is characterized by "a command economy supervised by a one-party state".

¹⁸ Rawls refers to "human capital" in terms of skills and educational training. Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital is more complex (see Bourdieu 2016 [1979]).

In POD, on the other hand, the aim is to realize in the basic institutions the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between citizens regarded as free and equal. To do this, those institutions must, from the outset, put in the hands of citizens generally, and not only of a few, *sufficient productive means for them to be fully cooperating members of society on a footing of equality*. Among these means is human as well as real capital, that is, knowledge and an understanding of institutions, educated abilities, and trained skills. (Rawls 2001, 140, emphasis added)

It is interesting to ask why it is that among the “productive means” for full cooperation that POD is expected to provide, we do not find some explicit reference to work. Isn’t it a productive means, and perhaps the most obvious one? When referring to fully cooperating members of society, it is hard to see how this would not include some reference to work.

Before assessing the implications of such a framework for labor justice, let us consider the system that Rawls puts on an equal footing to POD: liberal socialism. Rawls does not decide between POD and LS, because the principles of justice can be realized in both cases (Rawls 2001, 138). He believes that deciding between them is a practical matter, depending on historical circumstance. Even if Rawls considers POD more extensively and appears to sympathize with it to a greater extent, he never explicitly rejects LS.

In LS, the means of production are “owned by society” and “economic power is dispersed among firms” in the same manner as political power with democratic parties,

as when, for example, a firm’s direction and management is elected by, if not directly in the hands of, its own workforce. In contrast with a state socialist command economy, firms under liberal socialism carry on their activities within a system of free and workably competitive markets. Free choice of occupation is also assured. (Rawls 2001, 138)

Interestingly, this model has many elements in common with so-called “market socialism” (Roemer 1994; see Chapter II, §1 in this thesis), to the point where some have considered market socialism as coinciding with POD, or as somewhat spontaneously resulting from it (Schweickart 2012). Just as John Roemer has been asked whether he is a ‘true socialist’ for being open to the free market (Bertram 2007), so John Rawls has been asked whether he is a real liberal for being open to social ownership (Edmundson 2017). POD and market socialism are hybrid systems that attempt to combine concerns for equality with concerns for freedom: if state socialism threatens freedom, then concerns of equality are to co-exist with the free market. Note that “free occupational choice” is also a feature of liberal socialism and of market socialism as well (see Chapter II).

Rawls leaves open the theoretical question of whether POD or LS is preferable: “justice as fairness does not decide between these regimes” (Rawls 2001, 139). He describes some differences between POD and LS elsewhere, in his discussion of equal basic rights (Rawls 2001, 114). The exclusive use of personal property figures among them. That is, as a basic right and as a part of the social basis of self-respect, the “exclusive use of personal property” is not called into question by either of these institutional regimes. Neither LS or POD affect this basic right. Rather, what is “not basic”, and thus open to discussion, lies in this further specification:

- (i) the right to private property in natural resources and means of production generally, including rights of acquisition and bequest;
- (ii) the right to property as including the equal right to participate in the control of the means of production and of natural resources, both of which are to be socially, not privately, owned. (Rawls 2001, 114)

While an equal, basic right to personal property is out of question, what is left open to assessment is whether the natural resources and the means of production should be privately or socially owned and controlled. Rawls does not decide between these possibilities. He says that taking such decisions is not necessary in his framework, because whether natural resources and the means of production are privately or socially owned is not a question that affects the social bases of self-respect (and the exercise of the two moral powers). Nonetheless, both of these possibilities may be justified (Rawls 2001, 114). Once again, what has been called Rawls' "prescriptive agnosticism" (O'Neill 2008a, 39) leaves the adjudication between such competing possibilities to socio-historical circumstances: the theory, as a result, can remain practically unburdened.

4.2. *How Is Property-Owning Democracy Supposed to Affect the Division of Labor?*

Let us turn now to the problem that may interest us the most. A more explicit commitment to work can be found in Rawls' brief consideration of Marx's "legitimate objections" to liberalism. While addressing these objections – which include self-interested egoisms, formality of rights, and the negative character of liberties – Rawls says that Marx's criticisms to the division of labor under capitalism would no longer be justified in a property-owning democracy:

d) To the objection against the division of labor under capitalism, we reply that the narrowing and demeaning features of the division should be largely overcome once the institutions of property-owning democracy are realized (*Theory*, §79). (Rawls 2001, 177)

This passage makes an explicit connection between the institutional changes of a property-owning democracy and the expected improvements to the division of labor. To recall, the worst aspects of the division of labor pointed to by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (see §1 above) were monotony, routine work, and servile dependency. In this passage, Rawls seems to assume that the features he has identified as among the worst aspects of the division of labor coincide with those pointed to in Marx's objection. Is this assumption justified? To what objections, thus, does Rawls refer?

As is well-known, in *The German Ideology* Marx says that in a communist society, the "fixation of social activity" due to the division of labor will be surmounted:

(...) as soon as the distribution of labor comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. (Marx, *The German Ideology*)

In this passage, Marx is mainly concerned with the social fixation of activities and their effects on one's identity (for an interpretation of the ethical rationale of this passage, see Arneson 1987). This passage may thus fit with Rawls' concern for "variety" and "servile dependency",

given that, Marx continues, the cooperation of individuals will undergo “control and conscious mastery” in communism.

However, *neither Marx nor Rawls explains how changes in property relations would produce these ameliorations to the division of labor*¹⁹. Yet, it is hard to believe that the idea of variety of activity that Marx’s passage conveys coincides with that envisaged by Rawls. In other words, would the dispersion of capital allow us to “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, (...) without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic”? To answer this question, one may clarify whether Rawls’ reference to the worst aspects of the division of labor in *A Theory of Justice* (see §1 above) can be assimilated with Marx’s objections to the capitalist division of labor as presented in the *German Ideology*. But it seems that this cannot be done. In fact, while Marx seems mostly interested in the problem of *one’s social fixation into an activity*, Rawls is mostly committed to the Aristotelian principle and humans’ natural preference for complexity. While Marx’s concern is primarily social, Rawls’ is psychological. I do not develop further this point, for it would take us too far; what must be retained here is that it is not clear how POD would provide a response to Marx’s criticisms of the capitalist division of labor, for Rawls does not specify this. Nor is it clear how POD would affect the division of labor at all.

Yet assuming, as Rawls does, that the worst aspects of the division of labor as highlighted in *A Theory of Justice* (§79) coincide with Marx’s objections, what connection can be envisaged between changes in property arrangements and the suppression of the worst aspects of the division of labor? In other words, *how is the dispersion of economic and human capital operated by Property-Owning Democracy expected to result in the overcoming of monotony, routine, and servile dependency at work?* Rawls does not explain how and why POD would produce these asserted positive effects on the division of labor. Without specifications in this regard, Rawls seems to assume that, by addressing the issue of property, problems concerning the nature of the tasks performed and power end up being spontaneously addressed. Thus here we find again the ‘ripple effect’ conception of justice. As Hsieh has stressed, in POD workers are seen primarily as *owners*, not as *workers* (Hsieh 2009). The way in which an improvement within one dimension (distributive-economic) is supposed to affect the others (contributive and political-democratic) is not addressed. The condition of normative differentiation is thus not met, for in Rawls’ account, these dimensions seem to mold into one another; once again, we find the *derivative* thesis. Yet there is no obvious connection between changes in property relations and changes in the division of labor: one cannot simply assume that, fixing the one, the others are fixed too.

Even if Rawls does not explain this, I point out two possible ways to fill the gap between the distributive-economic dimension of POD and the alleged improvements to the conditions of work in the division of labor. In order to not neglect the different nuances of the notion of capital used by Rawls and their implications on labor justice, I suggest that we label such possible approaches the *economic capital thesis* and *human capital thesis*.

1. *POD economic capital thesis: freedom from material need as a premise of free occupational choice.*

Providing workers with economic security and thus with freedom from material need, the dispersion of economic capital (productive assets) allows real choice of occupation; and, due to the Aristotelian

¹⁹ According to Llorente 2006, in this famous passage Marx does not simply argue for the abolition of the division of labor, as it is commonly argued (for instance by Cohen 2008).

principle, people prefer work characterized by variety, complexity and self-direction. The worst aspects of the division of labor are thus avoided thanks to the free choice of the occupation allowed by freedom from material need.

This thesis interprets Rawls' response to Marx's objections on the deadening effects of the division of labor in terms of freedom from material need. If, thanks to capital dispersal, workers are not forced to take the first job they find due to economic need, then there is more room for choice – choice which, reasonably, would go to various, complex, and self-directed work, rather than to that which is monotonous, routine, and servilely dependent (recall the Aristotelian principle)²⁰.

The key difference between labor power and capital ownership in Marx is well known: what makes the working class vulnerable to exploitation is precisely the lack of capital ownership; for workers have nothing to sell but their labor power to capital owners (Marx 1887, vol.I, ch. 6). From this perspective, *material need* provides the very ground for exploitation, and for accepting deadening working conditions. Were workers free from economic need, labor relations and the balance of force would be less penalizing to workers. DiQuattro has suggested that capitalist exploitation would no longer take place in a property-owning democracy, for the class divisions peculiar to capitalism would be absent (DiQuattro 1983, 57)²¹. Thus, this may actually substantiate Rawls' statement on the positive effects of POD on the division of labor: workers would no longer be forced to sell their labor power to capital owners, for they would be capital owners themselves.

A similar form of the *POD economic capital thesis* suggested here has been argued by Nien-he Hsieh (2009) within a republican framework. Hsieh argues that Rawls' preference for POD over welfare-state capitalism “demonstrates that considerations about the nature of work play a more important role in his account of justice than it is often acknowledged” (Hsieh 2009, 397), with respect to two aspects: (i) the idea that workers are not in *relations of servitude*, and (ii) the idea that they have *meaningful work*.

Hsieh gives a “republican” interpretation of the notion of servitude as being subject to arbitrary interference (see Pettit 1997): the relationship between master and servant, he says, is distinctively characterized by the capacity for unjustifiable interference of the master over the servant (Hsieh 2009, 405; Pettit 1997). Hsieh thus suggests an answer that may have some relevance to the question we were addressing earlier: in what sense is POD supposed to affect the division of labor?

By reducing the degree to which individuals are dependent upon their labor for income, widespread ownership of productive assets helps to reduce the extent to which individuals are subject to the capacity for arbitrary interference. (Hsieh 2009, 406)

According to Hsieh, POD eliminates the condition of servile dependency that Rawls includes among the worst aspects of the division of labor in *A Theory of Justice*, by eliminating the

²⁰ One may also prefer simple and not self-directed work. I do not explore this possibility, since I am considering possibilities within a Rawlsian framework which assumes the Aristotelian principle (consider, however, Rawls' reflection on the preference for “counting blades of grass” Rawls 1999, 379).

²¹ “Since the class divisions peculiar to capitalism are absent in a property-owning democracy, the exploitation specific to capitalism must also be absent. There is no small class that, because it monopolizes ownership and control of the means of production, can extort a surplus from a working class owning nothing productive but its power to labor. This does not entail an absence of exploitation of a different kind. Even in a society in which productive resources are widely owned (either privately or socially), significant differences of income, wealth, and power may persist, and it may be that these differences are spawned by exploitative institutions and morally unjustified.” (DiQuattro 1983, 57)

situation of material dependence that workers find themselves in. This, in turn, would be expected to limit the levels of discretionary and arbitrary power in the workplace. This conclusion is drawn as a comparison to welfare-state capitalism: even if workers are not poor, they remain economically dependent on their work and thus they are exposed to arbitrary interference. In this sense, the positive effects on the division of labor to which Rawls refers would have to do with servile dependency. Hsieh's thesis is thus compatible with mine, even if I have not grounded it on a republican interpretation of freedom as non-interference but rather on freedom from material need as a condition for real free occupational choice, which is a primary good. In my view, if Rawls does not aim to give a merely negative interpretation of free occupational choice as a lack of legal constraint (as in Stalinism), but expanding this good so as to positively referring to freedom as real options at one's disposal, he has to accept a principle of equal freedom from material need.

As for (ii), among the positive effects that Hsieh attributes to POD, and which force us to take work into account when choosing between POD and welfare-state capitalism, there are also the increased opportunities for meaningful work (to be intended in the "objective" sense outlined earlier):

By reducing the degree to which individuals depend upon labor for their income, property-owning democracy helps individuals to secure meaningful work. Under welfare-state capitalism, most individuals depend upon their labor for income. Whether work is meaningful may be a factor in choosing one's occupation, but there are reasons that count against it being a significant factor under such circumstances. In contrast, under property-owning democracy, the meaningfulness of work can play a larger role in choosing one's occupation. (Hsieh 2009, 406)

By saying that POD prevents workers from being exposed to arbitrary interference thanks to the possibility of choice given by dispersed capital, Hsieh raises a key point: that of *freedom from material need* that I have just highlighted. As I have argued earlier, freedom from material need is a necessary condition for labor justice because it does away with the debilitating nature of dependence on labor for income and leaves room for *real* free occupational choice.

Hsieh's interpretation indirectly reconnects Rawls' concerns for meaningful work – as expressed in the response to Marx's objection – with the primary good of free occupational choice. One may argue that for this primary good to be provided, freedom from need ensured by capital dispersal must be provided too. It follows that under welfare-state capitalism, the primary good of free occupational choice cannot be guaranteed: there, people depend upon their labor for income, and thus are forced to accept occupations characterized by "the worst aspects of the division of labor". Normative considerations on work, thus, provide additional reasons in favor of POD over welfare-state capitalism.

Similar concerns have been expressed by Rodney Peffer (1990, ch. 9; 1994) when scrutinizing Marxian-like objections to Rawls' theory of justice. Among these objections, he identifies a lack, in Rawls' theory, of some sort of "minimum floor principle" as a pre-requirement to any demand of social justice (Peffer 1990, 384). The difference principle in itself, indeed, does not guarantee that people's first needs are met, whereas this should have a primary relevance. Peffer thus reformulates Rawls' principles of justice by placing the minimum floor requirement in a position of lexical priority even to the principle of equal freedom. Peffer does not relate this idea to the problem of work, even if this would be understandable from a Marxian perspective (which he defends). In fact, it is well-known that Marx characterizes the workers in the capitalist mode of production as those distinctively

lacking the means of survival, and thus forced to sell the only thing that they own – their labor force – to the owners of capital because of their lack of choice or, so to speak, to the material blackmail. Therefore, the *POD economic capital thesis* I have highlighted resonates both with Peffer and Hsieh’s suggestions as providing a minimum floor principle from the particular standpoint of labor justice. These intuitions thus converge in the norm of *equal freedom from material need as a necessary distributive condition for labor justice*.

Turning back to Hsieh, I wish to highlight some shortcomings of Hsieh’s reading and of the *POD economic thesis* which I have suggested as a possible response to the initial question – namely, “how is POD supposed to affect the division of labor?”. Hsieh’s thesis still offers a merely *external* commitment to labor justice. Arguing that POD would lighten servile dependency by decoupling labor from income and providing meaningful work, because people would have room for choice thanks to capital dispersal, concerns of justice are still restricted to the act of choice *before* entering the occupation. The principle of non-interference, to which Hsieh is committed, still stops at the door of work. In such a framework, *the worst aspects of the division of labor are not transformed in themselves, but avoided*. Even if there are reasons to believe that, once all are provided with dispersed capital, internal labor conditions may be likely to change, we are still restricting the perspective to an external act of choice that does not affect the internal norms and practices that reproduce unjust inequalities at work. Following this line of reasoning, once the choice has been made, one is supposed to be free to quit. While important, I argue that this is not sufficient.

The *POD economic capital thesis* and Hsieh’s arguments are still an external way to address the problem. Labor justice requires more than free occupational choice, even if positively re-interpreted in terms of capital dispersal as a necessary requirement for labor justice. By contrast, since he argues for the material floor principle within a broader framework that also includes concerns about workplace democracy (1990), Peffer cannot be said to defend an *external justice* view and is thus not vulnerable to the same objection.

Even though such elements bring us back to the *external justice* thesis, this discussion has highlighted an important point which should be retained for a conception of labor justice. *Equal freedom from material need* being necessary for *real free occupational choice*, this should be understood as an economic-distributive condition for labor justice.

But what about the POD human capital thesis? How is human capital expected to ameliorate the most deadening aspects of the division of labor?

2. *POD human capital thesis: educational resources for competing for meaningful work.*

The dispersion of human capital (education and training) provides people with increased skills and thus with increased educational assets for competing in the market for limitedly available meaningful jobs. The worst aspects of the division of labor would thus be avoided thanks to increased chances to succeed in the labor market competition for meaningful work.

In order to answer the question of how POD is expected to improve the division of labor, this thesis provides a possible interpretation of Rawls’ words that the dispersion of human capital (education and training) may provide people with increased skills and thus increased educational assets for competing in the market for the limitedly available positions of meaningful work. In fact, as we have seen, Rawls does not argue against competition in the labor market as the primary means of occupational selection (Rawls 2001, 64 §18.3); what he defends is rather a system of fair equality of opportunity. Therefore, the only way in which

increased skills may turn out to positively affect the division of labor is by *providing individuals with more resources to succeed in labor market competition*. But providing people with more skills and qualifications is very different from overcoming the worst aspects of the division of labor.

A mere increase in skills and qualifications does not in itself make work meaningful, nor does it improve unjustly unequal work structures. The equalization of human capital through POD would not eliminate the race for credentials and higher skills when competing for meaningful jobs. This does not make the labor market fair; rather, it may bring about the reverse effect, producing overqualified workers and a dramatic divorce between supply and demand in the labor market. Too many people would be competing for meaningful jobs, with too few positions available. It is, indeed, a situation which reflects many countries at present (Bryanin 2012). Millennials in Italy, for instance, are often said to be “overqualified” for the positions available. Yet, their “human capital” does not serve, as such, the cause of meaningful work: rather, in their work, they suffer from being confined to positions which are lower than what they are qualified for. Providing more educational tools in the competition for meaningful jobs leads to a zero-sum game. Equipping people for better competition does not make work in itself fairer. And we are, still, working within an *external* conception of labor justice.

As for Hsieh’s interpretation, it accommodates the tendency to overlook the human capital side of the question. Hsieh addresses the issue exclusively in terms of income. When reading the recent, growing literature on POD, it is striking to see how the question of human capital is neglected. Nonetheless, the *POD human capital thesis* has conjectured that the dispersion of educational assets may allow all to develop their skills in such a way that they have enhanced chances to compete in the market for meaningful work. The thesis, thus, connects POD to meaningful work in the classical sense of fair equality of opportunity – or, as Paul Gomberg would say, “*competitive equality of opportunity*” (Gomberg 1995; 2007). However *work does not become more meaningful or fairer from the mere fact that candidates are more skilled or qualified*. Credence in the thesis would seem to follow from an unjustified confusion between one’s skills and the job one can get. This is even more evident when considering what may be called the “somebody’s got to do it problem” (SGP). There are tasks that need to be done and which generally no one wants to perform. Faced with this, the dispersal of human capital does not provide responses to the problem of ensuring that SGP does not fall on the shoulders of some (see Chapter II, §7).

In conclusion, despite what Rawls says in answer to Marx’s objections to POD, it is not clear how the human capital provided by POD would improve the worst aspects of the division of labor. Since Rawls does not specify this, we are forced to speculate, as I have done by suggesting two possible interpretations linked to two different types of capital; but even these conjectures don’t support such an idea.

However, the fact that the *external* justice view underlying the *POD economic capital thesis* and Hsieh’s proposal are not sufficient should not to be taken as a total rejection of them. What should be retained from the discussion is that *freedom from material need* is a necessary but not sufficient condition of labor justice, for it substantiates the principle of real free occupational choice. It is a distributive-economic condition, which, as I have argued, constitutes one of the dimensions of labor justice. Furthermore, I hope to have shown that freedom of occupational choice requires some form of economic security, and thus that real free occupational choice requires a principle of freedom from material need as a primary

requirement of justice. By taking into account considerations of labor justice, Rawls would have benefited with further arguments in favor of POD.

Thus, labor justice requires as a distributive-economic condition that all are free from material need in order to actually benefit from the primary good of free occupational choice. This is the *economic-distributive condition* of labor justice. This should be accepted also by Rawlsians, given the weight that the idea of free occupational choice has in their framework, and given that the preference for POD among competing distributive patterns would benefit from another supporting argument. Beyond Hsieh, however, I argue that normative considerations on work cannot be content with free occupational choice: if considered as the sole element of labor justice, the *external justice* alone may be compatible with unfreedom and with strong labor inequalities.

4.3. *What About Power? The “Democracy” of Property-Owning Democracy*

Neither POD nor the POD economic capital thesis addresses issues of power in labor organizations. Despite the reference to “democracy” in its label, POD does not *as such* entail democratic-decision making, both in and outside of work. One may simply speculate that, the more ownership, the more power, the greater the participation in decision-making processes of workers. However, this is not necessarily true, and this is for at least two reasons.

1. The separation between capital ownership and capital management is a well-known historical process (Braverman 1975; Giddens 1983) that has altered the structure of organizations, making coincidence between property and power less obvious than it may seem at first glance. Rather, for workers’ increased power to be real, rules and procedures must be transformed for their own sake, this not being merely a matter of property. Likewise, the content of work should be addressed in itself, for the contributive content of each worker’s share of tasks raises questions qualitatively different from those concerning property (see Chapter V).

2. Rawls distinguishes explicitly between socialized property of the means of production and POD. In his account, whereas exclusive personal property is a basic right, and among the basic liberties, socialized property of the means of production is not a basic right.

Democracy and dispersed capital are quite different matters. Rawls himself distinguishes POD from workplace democracy, explicitly treating the subjects as different. He thinks that they are “fully compatible”, while acknowledging that workplace democracy poses a “major difficulty” to his theory (Rawls 2001, 178). He continues with his agnosticism when it comes to deciding between controversial possibilities that would undermine his commitment to freedom. Nonetheless, recalling John Stuart Mill’s proposal on worker-managed firms in *Principles of Political Economy* (2008 [1848], VI, ch. 7), Rawls says that worker-managed firms such as Mill’s are “fully compatible” with POD. In fact, given that (in Mill’s account) workers prefer such democratically organized firms over the capitalist ones, capitalist firms would “eventually disappear” and “be peacefully replaced by worker-managed firms within a competitive economy” (Rawls 2001, 178). Such a scenario of “soft transition” from capitalism to POD brings Rawls closer to recent developments in socialist thought²².

²² Consider, for example, the well-known article of Philippe Van Parijs and Robert van der Veen (1989); while Erik Olin Wright (2006; 2010) has recently advocated a need to overcome the ideal of the “great rupture” that has always been associated to the transition from capitalism to socialism. To his view, some mixed transformations, where capitalist elements co-exist with socialist ones, are far more likely to occur.

However, the degree of Rawls' commitment to worker-managed firms should not be exaggerated; he allocates only some cursory passages to the matter, in which the questions posed exceed the answers given. He does not take a position on key controversial issues, such as: are we to support worker-managed firms with subsidies that help them get going? Is democracy in the workplace also important because of the psychological effects necessary for a fully-fledged participation in society? (Singer 2015; O' Neill 2008a; Pateman 1970). With respect to these questions, Rawls explicitly says that he has "no idea of the answers" (Rawls 2001, 178). Then he refers the issue, once again, to the well-known "historical circumstances".

Even if Rawls seems to be generally sympathetic to the idea, and many speculations can be made about his actual or possible commitment to the subject, we must be content with the relatively modest idea that workplace democracy is *compatible* with property-owning democracy. The "democracy" of property-owning democracy is not to be understood as a change of the rules of the game of participation, but as a synonym for "equality" of distributive slots in property redistribution.

Some authors have attempted to fill in Rawls' normative vacuum, trying to draw more demanding conclusions on the implications of POD for justice at work. They show that attempts in the direction of workplace democracy using Rawlsian tools can be done. Recall, for instance, Schweickart's proposal of economic democracy (1980), Hussain's idea of "corporatist democracy" (2012), and Peffer's modification of the principles of justice so as to include workplace democracy (1990). Despite differences in institutional design, all of these authors agree that the inclusion of a right to take part in the decisions that affect one's work should be envisaged in a satisfying theory of justice, in line with the idea that the principle of self-determination should be extended also to the sphere of work (Pateman 1970; Young 1979; Peffer 1990).

5. The Subject of Justice: The "Where" and "Who" of Justice

So far, of Rawls' two rhetorical registers on work, I have only addressed the "explicit register", suggesting some possible ways to fill in the normative gaps between the distributive-economic dimension and the contributive and democratic dimensions. I have also pointed out that there is an implicit register to be taken into account. This implicit register can be found in Rawls' rich conceptual vocabulary of justice, where the realm of work and the division of labor is broadly presupposed and implicitly assumed, and one way or another left behind in his theorization.

If work and the division of labor appear as "shadows" behind Rawls' normative architecture, this paragraph aims to bring some of these hidden aspects into light. It will be concluded that Rawls should have committed himself to labor justice in a more significant way.

5.1. Cooperation Without Cooperation: The Basic Structure and the "Shadow" of Work

The idea of "social cooperation" plays a key role in Rawls' theory. Rawls himself describes it as his "central organizing idea" (Rawls 2001, 6). This is of interest because the idea of cooperation is one that immediately connects with work and the division of labor. But what does it mean exactly?

In *Justice as Fairness*, Rawls identifies three essential features of social cooperation (2001, 5 ff.). First, he discerns *cooperation* from mere *coordination*, the former being characterized by “publicly recognized rules and procedures which those cooperating accept as appropriate”. Second, cooperation includes the idea of fairness, the terms of which should be such that every participant can reasonably accept them provided that everyone else does the same. This includes the idea of reciprocity: “all who do their part as the recognized rules require are to benefit as specified by a public and agreed-upon standard”. Third, cooperation includes the idea of “rational advantage” pursued by each participant. To summarize, the three features of social cooperation thus are (i) *publicly accepted rules*, (ii) *fairness and reciprocity*, and (iii) *rational advantage*. Within this framework, the role of the principles of justice is to regulate “the division of benefits arising from social cooperation and allot the burdens necessary to sustain it” (2001, 7).

While social cooperation is described as a “central organizing idea”, Rawls specifies the subject of justice as being the basic structure, namely “the main political and social institutions and the way they hang together as one system of cooperation” (Rawls 2001, 9). The scope of the system of social cooperation is thus broader than that of the basic structure. The idea of a “system” here clearly refers to the integrated and complementary nature of the institutions to which justice applies. As is well-known, Rawls specifies the basic structure as the subject of justice in order to make it clear that the principles of justice apply neither to personal relations, such as friendship, nor to private associations, such as the church, but to the institutions and the so-called “background conditions”. This position has been questioned by many (Okin 1989; Cohen 1997; Julius 2003). Despite the differences between these criticisms, a common feature can be identified: they agree that, one way or another, the boundary between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the basic structure leaves behind, presupposes and assumes a number of spheres of life as a given, from which one cannot abstract when addressing issues of justice. In the case of Susan Moller Okin (1989), what has been arbitrarily put “outside” of the basic structure is the institution of the family; while in the case of Gerry A. Cohen, it is the *ethos* of a community, along with individual actions, which according to Cohen are largely presupposed by Rawls’ difference principle.

What I would like to highlight here is that it seems that, following the spirit of Okin and Cohen, a similar claim can be made about work and the division of labor: both are somewhat presupposed and, as Iris Marion Young has effectively stressed with respect to the concept of basic structure, assumed as a given in the background (Young 2006). Taking the idea of social cooperation seriously requires taking a wider look than that permitted by the moral grammar of distribution.

One may think that “social cooperation” is in essence just the division of labor, provided that the three above-mentioned conditions are met. However, despite this relatively trivial consideration, it is striking to note that Rawls hardly refers to such a system of cooperation in terms of *work*. In his references to the concept, he seems not to be particularly concerned with work. Perhaps, one may say, this is due to the highly abstract nature of this idea; this would be supported by what Rawls himself says on the fact that such a central organizing idea can be made “more determinate as we connect it with the other ideas”. Left alone, it is too vague. What is at stake in social cooperation is the fair distribution of benefits and burdens, but the degree of involvement of work and the division of labor in such benefits and burdens

seems to require further specification. Let us, then, address two features of social cooperation in turn, in order to highlight the role of the underlying “shadow” realm of work.

(i) Coordination is the mere fact that the members of society perform some activity in a coordinated way: this means that coordination is in principle compatible with slavery. In a slave system, certainly one cannot say that people are not engaged in some socially coordinated activity. But this is far from entailing cooperation (Rawls 1999a, 68). Cooperation presupposes that members of society *share its rules*. Importantly, Rawls does not opt for an example of free-riding on the tax system to make this point, but for coerced, unjust work. Being a slave means more essentially not being allowed to take part in the process of production of the rules. Thus, one cannot simply have cooperation and, at the same time, coercion: they are mutually exclusive.

Through the counterfactual example of slavery, a distinctive feature of cooperation is shown, namely that the rules of coordinated activity are to be publicly accepted and that all can fairly take part in this process.

It would be interesting to bring this point further, asking whether, along the lines of the example of slavery, contemporary unjust work structures are to be viewed as arising from publicly accepted, shared rules. If one thinks of gig and crowd employment, for instance, characterized by extremely precarious work conditions and powerlessness, it would be hard to say that they constitute forms of cooperation with shared rules; rather, following Rawls’ distinction, they should be thought of as merely coordinated activities.

But when it comes to the basic structure and its principles, as mentioned earlier, it is the distributive side of cooperation that prevails. It seems that there is a sort of scission between the two sides of social cooperation, the “contributive” and the “distributive” (see Introduction): even if Rawls resorts to work when he has to specify the nature of social cooperation, his conception of the basic structure built upon it is restricted to the distributive side. Cooperation is related to the ideas of benefits and burdens. But in Rawls’ framework, such benefits and burdens are widely referred to as economic goods – that is, as being confined to the *outcomes* of cooperation. If Rawls is concerned with *the outcomes of cooperation, rather than with cooperation itself*, then the very core of the idea of cooperation seems to get lost, for this would begin to look like a strange idea akin to “cooperation without cooperation”, even though the example of slavery seems to point to a different direction²³.

(ii) One may also say that the condition of reciprocity that defines social cooperation is indeed referring to work: after all, what else could it mean that “all do their part”? Reciprocity is a very important concept in Rawls’ theory. It may be described as a principle requiring that cooperation is not a zero-sum game: benefits of cooperation should not be monopolized by some, but be mutual; that is, reciprocity can be defined as the requirement that *no one benefit from advantages at the expense of others*. If one takes this idea seriously, it turns out that work structures, requiring too high costs to some for the benefit of others, can be seen as undermining reciprocity.

However, when applied to work, Rawls’ conception of reciprocity seems to point to a quite different problem. Rawls’ use of the concept that all should “do their part” suggests that no one should avoid work and at the same time ask to benefit from welfare measures – this is the well-known “Malibu surfer” problem. Take this passage from *Justice as Fairness*:

²³ For other considerations on the distributive outcomes of the division of labor, see Dietsch (2008).

In elaborating justice as fairness we assume that all citizens are normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life. (...) Now this assumption implies that all are willing to work and to do their part in sharing the burdens of social life, provided of course the terms of cooperation are seen as fair. (Rawls 2001, 179)

This idea conveys a view of work and the division of labor which is more oriented to what we may call ‘justice as suspicion of fraud’ rather than to ‘justice to the benefit of the oppressed’. The idea of reciprocity takes work into account in such a way that seems not to be able to represent the demands of justice of the oppressed. Rather than considering the interests of the oppressed, what the principle of reciprocity mostly deals with is the free-rider, the trickster, and the thief. Reciprocity in this sense, is mostly directed *against fraud* rather than *for the oppressed*. This gives a vaguely guilt-oriented, blaming and paternalizing nuance to the concept of reciprocity.

The Malibu surfer crystallizes the idea of free-riding on social cooperation as a paradigmatic example of lack of reciprocity. Yet, I argue that reciprocity can also be said to go unmet when the labor burden required of some is qualitatively and quantitatively heavier than that required of others. Why should reciprocity be exclusively thought of in “in or out” terms, so that concerns are raised only when one does *not* contribute to cooperation, thereby neglecting the “internal terms” of such cooperation? Shouldn’t the ways in which one contributes and the terms under which one does so count as much as the fact of contributing itself? Reciprocity could be a more demanding idea than that of simply doing one’s part. In other words, doing one’s part should not go to the benefit of some at the expense of others in the additional sense of *how* we cooperate, besides the sense of *whether* or not we cooperate at all. That is, reciprocity should be extended to *the conditions of cooperation* themselves.

When it comes to work, therefore, it seems that more has to be said, especially on the side of those who are oppressed in social cooperation. Take the example of the so-called “dirty workers” (Hughes 1962). They perform socially necessary tasks at low wages and receive little social recognition. Their work is neither very self-directed nor varied. Of course they cannot be said to not “do their part” in social cooperation – thus, they certainly meet the Rawlsian requirement of reciprocity. A person performing self-directed, well-paid, socially recognized, and meaningful work, and a dirty worker doing loosely supervised, low paid, and socially stigmatized work, *are equal from the point of view of Rawls’ idea of reciprocity: after all, they both “do their part”*. Yet they cooperate in very different ways: the labor burdens they shoulder are considerably different, but this does not raise concerns to the so-defined notion of reciprocity. Likewise, through the lens of Rawls’ idea of reciprocity, women’s overcharge of housework would not raise concerns: if men work outside of the home and women take charge of most care work, both “do their part” and there is nothing objectionable in the gendered division of housework. Far more examples may be offered.

Social cooperation so defined seems not to include concerns of fairness in distribution of labor burdens, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In order for the members of society to be “fully cooperating members”, what should be considered is not only *whether they free-ride or not on social cooperation* but also *whether they cooperate on an equal basis to others*: otherwise, some will benefit from social cooperation at the expense of others, and the condition of proper reciprocity will not be met.

Reciprocity, thus, should be extended in two ways:

- first, by also taking into account the content and the quality of social cooperation, not merely the fact of being inside or outside of it (from “doing one’s part” to the nature of such doing one’s part); and
- second, by addressing concerns from the perspective of the oppressed rather than that of the free-rider (from *justice-suspicion* to *justice-inclusion*); in other words, the perspective of reciprocity should care about the exploited rather than the exploiter.

5.2. *Social Unions and the Boundaries of Justice*

One may object that the examples of dirty work and of gendered division of labor in the household miss the point. After all, these forms of work do not concern the basic structure: their institutional setting is what Rawls refers to as “social unions”, voluntary associations of people that share common ends. Thus, given that they lie outside of the basic structure, which is the very subject of justice, justice does not apply to them. Clearly, by drawing the boundaries of the subject of justice, the idea of basic structure simultaneously defines what justice is *not* about.

According to Rawls, justice does not concern personal relations and a number of associations such as professional associations, churches, firms, and the family. The realm of work is surprisingly absent among social unions (see also Schwartzenbach 2015, 790). This demarcation between voluntary associations and the basic structure has produced a long debate (Okin 1989; Cohen 1997; Pogge 2000; Julius 2003; Young 2006). What can be retained from this debate is that *the boundaries of justice*, so to speak, are far from clear; so defined, these boundaries tend to be arbitrarily defined and too static, i.e. impervious to social change, or to what Nancy Fraser has referred to as “the boundary struggles” (2016).

Work and the division of labor bring to light the relatively arbitrary nature of such boundaries, for they cut across personal ties (women’s care work in the household), social unions (work in firms and corporations) and institutions. It is worth dwelling on the idea of the institution for a moment. As Rawls describes them, institutions are “public systems of rules which define offices and positions with their rights and duties, powers and immunities” (1971, 47). It is hard to deny that organizations of work – to use an indeterminate expression – essentially fit this description²⁴.

When viewed from the perspective of work, the distinction itself between a basic structure and social unions appears problematic, for forms of work are part of both the basic structure and of social unions: work is on the one hand institutionalized in practices and structures, and on the other, organized and performed through what Rawls calls “social unions”. Consider the “where” of work: households, firms, corporations, organizations of various kinds (not to mention the question, raised by many, of the difficulty in drawing a precise boundary between work and non-work, especially in contemporary times, an important issue that I leave aside for the moment). The normative consequences of this are clear: *if these “social unions” that constitute the very ‘stage’ of work, so to speak, lie outside of the scope of justice (because they are not part of the basic structure), then unjust inequalities at work cannot be addressed.* As Susan Moller Okin has effectively observed (1989), a theory of justice so conceived cannot say much about

²⁴ Yet, one may object that, even if they include rules that define positions, rights, and powers, they are not to be deemed ‘public’. But this distinction between private and public nature of the firms is increasingly called into question. See Ciepley 2013; Landemore and Ferreras 2015; Ferreras 2017; Anderson 2017.

women's overburden of housework (see also Breen and Cooke 2005). Yet, unlike Okin's criticism, I argue that the issue goes far beyond the family: firms, corporations, organizations that include work activities follow the same fate of unequal division of labor.

Work and the division of labor challenge Rawls' fence of justice. They show that the subject of justice is wider than that supposed by a distributive conception of cooperation (Young 1990; 2006). Seen from this perspective, this point is in tension with Samuel Freeman's interpretation of the primary good of PPO that I discussed earlier (Freeman 2007): after all, if justice does not apply to social unions, we have one more reason to be skeptical about the possible interpretation of PPO as involving authority and responsibility at work. Indeed, this raises problems also with respect to the idea of workplace democracy that Rawls himself considers as compatible with POD (see above): in the light of the exclusion of social unions from the basic structure as the subject of justice, one has one more reason to take seriously Rawls' acknowledgement that workplace democracy would be a "major difficulty" to his theory (Rawls 2001, 178).

It is Rawls' position that justice within social unions – like the family – *indirectly results from* the justice of basic institutions. This appears to be another formulation of what I have called the *derivative* thesis: to Rawls, we are to make sure that the "background conditions" are fair, and then fairness within particular organizations will naturally follow. But first, it is questionable that such background conditions do not involve structures of work, which are the very source of what can be distributed. The boundaries of such background conditions should be revised. Second, I have argued that such framework *tolerates insupportable levels of labor inequality*, which cannot exist but *within* these social unions that Rawls excludes from the scope of justice. Where else should they be, otherwise?

One may raise the following objections: why should such levels of inequality be deemed insupportable? I will address this question later, but for the moment I would like to stress that an answer to this question can be found even in Rawls' writings. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls argues that excessive inequalities are a threat to social stability: that is, they are "destructive of citizens' self-respect" and of "their sense that they are members of society and not simply caught in it" (Rawls 2005, lix). Thus, in 1993 and later on, Rawls explicitly acknowledges that the lack of opportunities for meaningful work undermines social stability, to the point that the hypothesis of "society as an employer of last resort" should be considered (Rawls 2005, lix). Thus, *if excessive inequalities undermine social stability, and such inequalities exist in the labor structure other than income, as Rawls clearly acknowledges in the same passage, then there are even Rawlsian reasons to criticize the distinction between the basic structure and social unions from the perspective of work*. For Rawls' observations on the problems that "excessive inequalities" may entail for social stability to be consistent with the exclusion of social unions from the scope of justice, Rawls' idea of the basic structure should be widened so as to include work structures. Therefore it must be concluded that, if insupportable levels of labor inequality are tolerated, then social stability will be undermined: there are even Rawlsian reasons for including work and the division of labor in the basic structure.

To sum up, in this paragraph I have argued that 1) reasons for excluding work and the division of labor from the scope of justice are not compelling; 2) if considered, work and the division of labor make it clear that Rawls' boundaries of justice between the basic structure and social unions are controversial, given that they crosscut them; 3) there are even Rawlsian reasons for work and the division of labor to be understood as being part of the basic structure

– that is, the subject of justice should be widened so as to include what Rawls restricts to the realm of social unions.

To be consistent with the idea that social unions are outside of justice, neither workplace democracy nor labor inequalities can be of justice concern in a Rawlsian framework. This is an important shortcoming of Rawls' theory, for this way Rawls' justice does not provide resources to address unequal work structures, implicitly endorsing the idea that the confinement of dirty workers in the lower levels of labor hierarchies, status-segregated occupations, the gendered division of labor and so forth have to do with the private spheres of personal preferences – the ethical sphere – and not problems of justice. Since these inequalities may undermine social stability, and the boundaries of the basic structure should be revised.

5.3. *Class, Status and Life-Prospect: Who Are the Least Advantaged?*

Rawls' conception of justice firmly refuses the idea that injustice is a prerogative of some specifically identifiable groups, and that it can be ascribed to preemptively defined personal traits. This is the rationale for focusing on primary goods rather than on persons: injustice happens when there is a lack or an inadequate distribution of goods that are objectively identifiable and “open to public view” (Rawls 2001, 59), as well as necessary for pursuing one's life plan. The “least advantaged” of society are thus identifiable as “those belonging to the income class with the lowest expectations” (Rawls 2001, 59). It follows that

the least advantaged are never identifiable as men or women, say, or as whites or blacks, or Indians or British. They are not individuals identified by natural or other features (race, gender, nationality, and the like). (Rawls 2001, 59, note 26)

This position is supported further by Rawls' reasons for the basic structure as the primary subject of justice. One reason lies in its “profound and pervasive influence” (Rawls 2001, 55) on persons: the basic structure shapes individuals' life-prospects, and it does so especially through three kinds of “social contingencies”: their class of origin; their native endowments (and the opportunities to develop them); and their good or bad luck (Rawls 2001, 55).

Note that from this account of the social contingencies affecting one's life-prospects, one derives a picture 1) restricted to the economic side of injustice, and 2) centered on class as the privileged, if not the exclusive, site of inequality. Income and social class are central in Rawls' view: it is them that he thinks of when considering contingencies that affect people's life-prospects, and this is so despite his view that the difference principle was addressed to the *socio-economic* inequalities, as seen earlier. And this is also notwithstanding what he himself acknowledges as normatively relevant for an account of equality, in the paragraph devoted to equality and influenced by Scanlon's view (Rawls 2001, 130): status inequality.

The exclusion of race, gender, and nationality from the scope of the contingencies that count as affecting people's life-prospects is questionable. And this is the case *also* for economic reasons. The idea that one's social class is exclusively or primarily relevant for people's life-prospects neglects the crucial role that one's gender, race, and nationality plays not only in mediating people's access to income (here is the economic reason), but also in the way people contribute to social cooperation (see Chapter IV). Sociologists have demonstrated that class is by no means the only filter at work in shaping durable inequalities; social status is also central (Weber 1922; Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Ridgeway 2014) as well as one's position

in the division of labor. Social phenomena like the gendered and racialized division of labor, as well as gender-based occupational segregation in all sorts of organizations are examples. Take the example of “status exploitation” (Van Parijs 1987): a non-citizen, merely in virtue of their status as a non-citizen, is liable to worse working conditions. This can also be true for reasons of gender and race.

Rawls responds to the question of why gender and race are not included among the social contingencies that affect people’s life-prospects by saying that “ideal theory”, taking the basic structure as the subject of justice, does not include “fixed natural characteristics” like gender and race as relevant positions (see also Mills 2009; Okin 1989). Still, he concedes that “nevertheless, *sometimes other positions* must be taken into account” (emphasis added):

Suppose, for example, that certain fixed natural characteristics are used as grounds for assigning unequal basic rights, or allowing some persons only lesser opportunities; then such inequalities will single out relevant positions. Those characteristics cannot be changed, and so the positions they specify are points of view from which the basic structure must be judged. Distinctions based on gender and race are of this kind. (Rawls 2001, 65)

Rawls does not confine himself to the omission of status from his account of social contingencies; he even justifies this omission on theoretical grounds (see also DiQuattro 1983, 55). The existence of “relevant social positions” – that is, Rawls’ classes (DiQuattro 1983, 55) – implicitly supposes the existence of *irrelevant* social positions. Of course, “relevant” is not to be taken as a judgement of value, but is to be understood in terms of pertinence to the basic structure. Nonetheless, this is questionable. Being a woman or a racialized person are still very important mediators of one’s life-prospects: women continue to have places in very few leadership positions, both political and economic, and their levels of unemployment are far higher than those of men (see Chapter IV). Racialized people are reserved for the lowest rangs of the labor ladder. To continue to assume that the well-documented penalization of women and racialized people in the labor market doesn’t shape their life-prospects makes little sense. Structures of work powerfully contribute to the reproduction of status inequalities (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; 2014; Tilly 1998; Hughes 2017 [1958]; Gomberg 2007).

Furthermore, what is striking in this account is the reference to gender and race as “fixed natural characteristics”, which as such “cannot be changed”. This description ignores a basic sociological evidence: that gender and race are first of all *social norms*, not fixed natural characteristics. This difference is not irrelevant for justice, for it is in the nature of social norms themselves that they are *liable to change*, unlike fixed natural characteristics. Gender and race can be described as social statuses, which can be described in turn as normative social expectations (Dahrendorf 1972; Fourie 2012; Ridgeway 2014). Such social norms and their effects are not “exceptional”, as Rawls’ language suggests, so that “sometimes” they are to be considered. Rather, they are embedded in social structures and practices that continuously reproduce inequalities, making them circulate and strengthen, so as to turn them into “durable inequalities”, as proven by the illuminating work of Charles Tilly (1998). Cecilia Ridgeway (2014) has given a brilliant demonstration of the micro-social processes that reproduce people’s status in everyday interactions, and Charles Tilly has proven that the organizational structure of organizations reproduces what he refers to as “categorical inequalities” through gender-based segregation in the division of labor (Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; see Chapter IV, §2 in this thesis). Therefore, by taking gender and race as “naturally fixed characteristics”, Rawls misunderstands their nature and underestimates their role in shaping

people's life-prospects, which should be understood as equally as influential as to social class (Fraser 2003). Far from being seen as mere natural traits – which would also be imprecise to say, for that would be sex and not gender, and for race has not longer taken as a biological concept for many decades – gender and race should be primarily understood as social norms of status that affect people's participation in social cooperation. Justice, therefore, cannot be restricted to what he calls “the standard relevant positions specified by the primary goods” (Rawls 2001, 66). Once again, Rawls' language points to a sort of ‘exceptionalism’ regarding gender and race's social contingencies, for if there is a “standard”, if there is a social contingency that can be taken as representative, *ça va sans dire*, what lies outside of this standard is less relevant and normatively negligible. That gender and race do not affect people's life prospects is thus a “hope”, as he says, for Rawls believes that once opportunities are equalized along with equal basic liberties, they will not specify “relevant points of view” (Rawls 2001, 66). The problems that arise from discriminations and distinctions of that kind “are not on its agenda”; sure, “this is indeed an omission in *Theory*; but an omission is not as such a fault” (Rawls 2001, 66). But can the agenda of justice neglect social contingencies that play a key role in reproducing socio-economic inequalities that, as Rawls himself argues, threaten social stability? The notion of disadvantage should thus be widened accordingly. We are thus left without tools to criticize unequal forms of the division of labor both within the family and within firms and organizations of all sorts. The division between conception and execution, for instance (Schwartz 1982; Murphy 1993; Young 1990; Gomberg 2007), and the unequal division between work charge and recognition cannot be addressed. The normative language of basic rights and liberties does not tell us how to not overburden some to the benefit of others when it comes to socially necessary tasks. Additionally, what Rawls refers to as the worst aspects of the division of labor cannot simply be avoided due to the exclusion of social unions from the basic structure. This is a major theoretical weakness which confirms the suspicion that distributive justice is not the best framework for addressing labor justice. Also, the very idea that social unions like firms and the family are not political is highly questionable and would require further justification (Ferrerias 2017; Anderson 2017).

Rawls' concessions on the subject of gender are much more generous than his relative silence on race. When considered from the perspective of work, race is a powerful principle structuring the division of labor; racialized people are reserved for the lower ranks of the labor ladder in such a way that their status as “inferiors” is continuously reproduced by social structures other than cultural attitudes (Gomberg 2007; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Wingfield and Alston 2016). Why should this not be seen as a relevant social contingency shaping one's life-prospects? Why confine the gaze of justice to class?

The literature of feminist critiques of Rawls' theory is particularly rich (Pateman 1988; Okin 1989; Nussbaum 2000). In §50, Rawls clearly acknowledges that the family is part of the basic structure because of its crucial role in the production and reproduction of society. However, he argues that justice does not concern the internal life of the many associations (Rawls 2001, 163). Once again, the exclusion of social unions from the basic structure is used as an argument for justifying their exclusion from the scope of justice²⁵. Sociological research

²⁵ “Note that much the same question arises in regard to all associations, whether they be churches and universities, professional and scientific associations, business firms and labor unions. The family is not peculiar in this respect. (...) Thus, although the principles of justice do not apply directly to the internal life of churches, they do protect the rights and liberties of their members by the constraints to which all churches and associations are subject. This is not to deny that there are appropriate conceptions of justice that apply directly to most if not all associations and groups, as well as to the various kinds

has shown that when compared with men, women perform an extra-month of work per year (Hochschild 1997; 2012b). Compare this fact with Rawls' own words:

Since wives are equally citizens with their husbands, they have all the same basic rights and liberties and fair opportunities as their husbands; and this, together with the correct application of the other principles of justice, should suffice to secure their equality and independence. (Rawls 2001, 164)

The normative language of rights, liberties and opportunities is not equipped to grasp inequalities in the division of labor in the household, nor do they help to address gender-based labor segregation. The separation between the point of view of "people as citizens" and the point of view of "people as members of families and other associations" (see 165) entails the impossibility of addressing unequal divisions of labor as problems of justice. They are, at most, ethical problems affecting one's personal conception of the good.

However, Rawls concedes that something should be done against women's overburden of housework and care responsibilities. His response, however, is a distributive one, speaking in the language of income:

If a basic, if not the main, cause of women's inequality is their greater share in the bearing, nurturing, and caring for children in the traditional division of labor within the family, steps need to be taken either to equalize their share or to compensate them for it. How best to do this in particular historical conditions is not for political philosophy to decide. But a now common proposal is that as a norm or guideline, the law should count a wife's work in raising children as entitling her to an equal share in the income her husband earns during their marriage. (Rawls 2001, 167)

Women should be "compensated" through their husbands' income for their wider share of housework. I argue that this response is inadequate for at least two reasons. First, it does not meet the normative differentiation condition: it responds to labor injustice only by means of income. It provides an economic response to a problem that is not merely economic. Second, it further confines women into their subordinate contributive roles, thereby reproducing their status-based contributive segregation. As shown earlier (3.3), this is highly problematic from the perspective of equality²⁶.

The perspective of work and the division of labor sheds light on the shortcomings of the distinction between the basic structure and social unions, for they cross-cut the structures of society. Without addressing them, Rawls' theory is unable to provide us with tools to address unequal forms of the division of labor. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on class is outdated. The exclusive focus on class as the core of social injustice has been called into question by sociologists and political theorists. The "proletariat" no longer holds a monopoly on social injustice, also because there is no longer such a thing as a proletariat, but rather a highly internally differentiated class of people called "the precariat" (Standing 2011; Savage 2014) which includes migrants and non-citizens. A multidimensional awareness of social

of relationships among individuals. Yet these conceptions are not political conceptions. In each case, what is the appropriate conception is a separate and additional question, to be considered anew in any particular instance, given the nature and the role of the association, group, or relation at hand." (Rawls 2001, 164)

²⁶ The other theoretical tools that Rawls provides are equally inadequate for addressing this problem. The Aristotelian Principle is not of much help here, nor is the principle of free occupational choice. The contributive interpretation of the difference principle would require that men's contributive advantage goes to the benefit of women, which is not what currently happens; such a principle, so interpreted, would thus help us to criticize this labor inequality. But, once again, it cannot do so if the household is put outside of the basic structure. We therefore remain at the same point.

differentiation and the ways in which such categories interact with one another without being entirely mutually reducible is needed. Struggles for recognition exceed class struggles, for they follow a different normative language and social logic, irreducible to that of class (Fraser 2003). *A fortiori*, when considered from the perspective of labor justice, the assumption that social class is the only determiner of benefits and burdens is not tenable. Work and the division of labor provide the crucial stage within which status inequalities are perpetrated; at the same time, status inequalities powerfully structure the division of labor in turn.

In conclusion, I have argued that the perspective of work sheds light 1) on the shortcomings of Rawls' exclusion of social unions from the scope of justice, and 2) on the insufficiency of class as the exclusive or primary social segment relevant to people's life-prospects. As a result, 3) it is concluded that people's social status – i.e. their gender and race – cannot be meaningfully put aside when considering what shapes such life-prospects, and that the notion of the “least advantaged” should be widened accordingly.

6. Conclusion

On the whole, it must be concluded that the resources that Rawls provides do not allow for a fully-fledged conception of labor justice. While concerns for work are not completely lacking in his model, and they may be developed further from some of its premises, still a significant commitment does not automatically follow from them. Only by expanding from Rawls' relative reticence on the subject is it possible to derive some conception of labor justice, but as we have seen, there are still problems, mostly due to (i) the trade-off between the perfectionist view of work and fairness in distribution, and (ii) the exclusion of social unions from the basic structure, that is, the exclusion of the realm of production and reproduction from the scope of justice.

In what follows, I sum up the conclusions of this chapter, outlining the critical-normative potential of Rawls' tools with respect to labor.

The Aristotelian Principle. This principle would allow us to say that a certain kind of work does not satisfy the Aristotelian principle because it is not sufficiently complex and challenging. However, as Rawls himself acknowledges, the notion of complexity is subjective, for what one person finds complex is not necessarily what another person finds complex²⁷; moreover, what really counts in this principle is the person's enjoyment of the activity, rather than complexity ‘in itself’. Furthermore, even if this principle is intended to express a psychological truth, it injects elements of perfectionism into Rawls' view, thus reproducing the *impasse* that has led most theorists of justice to exclude work from the scope of justice. The idea that work can be normatively addressed only in perfectionist terms, which is the reason for this *impasse*, however, is not necessary: there can be ways far more sensitive to pluralism to address it. The trade-off between perfectionism (the Aristotelian principle) and liberalism (free choice of occupation and fair equality of opportunity) impedes any development of a conception of labor justice. This trade-off can be overcome by bringing deontological concerns of justice into the world of work and the division of labor. An internal consideration of work would address it in terms of justice, not of the good. I will elaborate this alternative perspective in Chapter V.

²⁷ In Chapter V, I will defend a “deontological” conception of complex work negatively defined as non-routine work, that may go beyond this subjectivist *impasse*.

Free Occupational Choice. This principle – indeed one of Rawls’ primary goods – allows to say that no one can be forced into an occupation. However, I have argued that this principle could be conceived of in a more demanding and substantive way, as requiring that all be equally free from material need, as in the *POD economic capital thesis*. I have argued that from the liberal principle of free occupational choice we should derive a principle of equal freedom from material need as a key distributive-economic condition of labor justice.

Fair Equality of Opportunity. This principle allows us to say that all should be able to compete to attain desired positions regardless of one’s social origins. While very important, this confines us to the *external justice* thesis. Nonetheless, it should be taken as another distributive strand of labor justice, for fair conditions of access cannot be avoided. I will problematize the principle of equality of opportunity in Chapter II, when discussing John Roemer’s luck egalitarian-socialist framework.

Work as a Primary Good. The discussion has shown that only by skewing Rawls’ words can work be considered as part of the index of primary goods. There are two primary goods that may open the path for such inclusion: the social basis of self-respect and positions of authority and responsibility in political institutions. Whereas opportunities for meaningful work are among the social bases of self-respect, but play neither a special nor necessary role in them, positions of authority and responsibility cannot be said to refer unequivocally to positions in economic organizations. Thus, only by pushing Rawls’ view from its relative reticence on the subject can we derive a more significant commitment to issues of labor from the index of primary good. Rawls, unlike Michael Walzer, does not argue for the *distributability* thesis. But the index does also include other “atypical” goods like freedom and rights. Even if we extend the index so as to include work – i.e. “meaningful work” – there would be the problem still that issues relating to work cannot be comprehensively resolved by the distributive logic, since they involve other equally relevant dimensions and qualitative considerations.

Difference Principle. The principle allows us to say that income inequalities should be subject to the difference principle (presumably through taxes), but with respect to our problem, this does not meet the normative differentiation condition, requiring that work and the division of labor be taken as discrete realities, raising distinct normative questions. For income is only one side of the question. However, if interpreted in contributive terms, the difference principle may powerfully help criticize excessive inequalities in the labor structure. Such interesting potentiality is not developed by Rawls, but remains an important possibility to be explored further. It could fill in the gap of the substantial lack of egalitarian tools when it comes to work. There are reasons for this, since there is no reason to restrict the idea of inequality to income and wealth, and Rawls himself talks about social and economic inequalities.

Property-Owning Democracy. Despite Rawls’ own assertions, POD has no direct connection with improvements in the division of labor, except from the principle of equal freedom from need that I have argued for: POD’s capital dispersal may allow *real* free occupational choice by preventing people from reaching a situation of restricted choice due to material need. Yet POD deals with individuals as owners, not as workers: the normative differentiation condition calls for a distinctive focus on workers *as* workers.

Social Cooperation, Basic Structure, Social Unions, and the Least Advantaged: the discussion has shown that, starting from these key concepts, a stronger commitment to the subject of labor justice should have been developed, because: (i) the idea of cooperation should not be merely understood in distributive terms; (ii) work and its structures crosscut the strict boundaries

between the basic structure and social unions; and (iii) the least advantaged are also those who suffer from relational forms of inequality in terms of social status, other than social class. On the whole, it may be said that, taking such key concepts seriously, the relative neglect of labor is highly objectionable.

A difficulty lies in the substantial lack of *egalitarian* tools to address work issues. Rawls thinks of work mostly through the lens of *freedom*, while the difference principle, which tells us exactly which inequalities are acceptable, is supposed to regulate income and wealth. Equality joins the game only in terms of fair equality of opportunity. The underlying assumption is that work does not raise concerns of equality. A way to address this is to extend the applicability of the difference principle to work and the division of labor. But this would require a substantial redefinition of the boundaries of the basic structure. Finally, just like other distributive models, the liberal-egalitarian model is essentially one-dimensional: it tends to untouched, or more precisely to subsume under the distributive logic, the political, the contributive, and the relational dimensions of labor justice.

In conclusion, considerations on the nature of work, on its fairness and on equality at work should have played a more important role in the decision between competing institutional arrangements, as well as in Rawls' principles of justice. In fact, work and its structures are part of the basic structure (see also Young 2006). The liberal-distributive model thus does not provide resources for a fully-fledged conception of labor justice. Broadly speaking, it underrepresents work and thus contributes to its exclusion from the realm of justice; it reduces work to just one dimension²⁸ – that of income – despite its inherent multidimensionality and social differentiation; it lacks a relational understanding of injustice and equality. However, it does offer some resources that can be rescued for a conception of labor justice, namely *the distributive-economic condition for equal freedom from material need (for real free occupational choice) and fair equality of opportunity*. Such a condition is necessary but not sufficient: it still works within the *external justice* thesis, and addresses justice in a one-dimensional way.

²⁸ For instance, consider this passage: “Now it seems impossible to avoid a certain arbitrariness in actually identifying the least favored group. One possibility is to choose a particular social position, say that of the unskilled worker, and then to count as the least favored all those with approximately the income and wealth of those in this position, or less.” (Rawls 1999, 68). In this passage, he clearly acknowledges the arbitrariness of any definition of the least advantaged, but he also clearly points to the unskilled worker as suffering from injustice restricted to income.

Chapter II

Work and Other Models of Distributive Justice: Socialist, Allocative, Pluralist

“(S)he who does not work will not eat”
(New Testament aphorism)

This chapter takes a closer look at what happens when models of distributive justice are observed through the lens of labor justice. The previous chapter discussed the liberal-egalitarian model of John Rawls. In this chapter, I focus on three further models: luck-egalitarian-socialist, allocative, and pluralist models of distributive justice. While they do not exhaust all possible options of distributive models, they are some of the most representative and influential distributive views of the last number of decades, and raise some key issues about labor justice. Among the many luck egalitarians, I will confine my attention to John Roemer and Richard Arneson. I then discuss Philippe Van Parijs’ view on universal basic income as a representative of the allocative model, as well as Michael Walzer’s theory of justice as a pluralist model. I identify some key questions raised by these accounts, as well as their strengths and weaknesses with respect to our problem. The weaknesses will lead to the conclusion that such models of distributive justice cannot provide but limited resources labor justice. The strengths will be included into the economic-distributive dimension of labor justice, which should be understood as an essential, but insufficient, component among others.

In the first section, I engage in a dialogue with John Roemer’s luck egalitarian view and market socialism. First, I address the norm of equality of opportunity for self-realization, highlighting the shortcomings of a luck egalitarian perspective when it comes to labor, and particularly its lack of a multidimensional perspective. Second, I discuss Roemer’s notion of exploitation, and its problematic relation to labor, showing that fails to provide resources for labor justice. Finally, I compare Roemer’s market socialism with Rawls’ property-owning democracy, showing that Roemer’s perspective makes possible the inclusion of more elements into the economic-distributive condition for labor justice – more precisely, he includes profits into redistributive considerations. Despite this, he does not provide resources for rethinking the organization of work, and seems to take contributive inequality for granted. He restricts the notion of “work” to paid work in the formal economy, and focuses the scope of justice on individuals’ behaviors rather than on social structures. On the whole, I will show that Roemer’s theory exacerbates the shortcomings of the *derivative* and *external justice* theses common to the distributive views. As an egalitarian, self-labelled socialist thinker, it turns out that Roemer’s socialist ideal is a relatively narrow one, for it defends a conception of equality that does not include concerns for labor justice at all, and lacks fundamental traits of multidimensionality.

In the second section, I address a different problem: that of the right to meaningful work. Richard Arneson’s article “Market Socialism and Meaningful Work” (1987) will provide the ground for a broader discussion over the legitimacy of bringing work into the realm of justice in its own right. I will argue that addressing work normatively in terms of personal preference and self-realization fundamentally misplaces the problem, for it restricts the perspective to a

false antithesis between value pluralism and labor justice. This false antithesis has led political theorists to exclude concerns of work from the scope of justice altogether. Arneson's view is widely shared in political philosophy, and this false antithesis has ended up "privatizing" work issues and implicitly naturalized current work structures. I will suggest that the perspective should be alternatively framed: a pragmatic pluralist perspective can allow us to maintain concerns for labor justice without, however, making substantive claims about what kind of meaning work should inherently have for individuals. I will argue that a pluralist understanding of the role of work in human lives can be compatible with concerns of fairness in the division of labor. Such compatibility, however, should not be misunderstood as a myth of neutrality: rather than claiming to be neutral, it pragmatically displaces the problem of work from the dispute over whether or not it is inherently meaningful to a concern for work being itself just.

The chapter will then explore the idea of a universal basic income (UBI) from the perspective of work. I address the relationship between a universal basic income and other forms of distributive justice. I will show that the idea of UBI contains some typical assumptions on work that considerably restrict the scope of labor justice, namely the "exit choice thesis" and the "bargaining power thesis". UBI also provides a further example of the derivative thesis: allocating money to individuals on a regular basis is said to have the potential to change labor structures and the relationships between owners and workers, within what I will call a "ripple effect" conception of labor justice. Beyond theoretical arguments, I test the UBI view through a contributive justice test: I show that the allocative response to technologically-driven changes at work, as well as to the gendered division of labor, is partial and insufficient. I will argue that UBI provides a distributive answer to what is essentially a contributive question. Nonetheless, I argue that UBI provides us with a precious resource for labor justice: unconditional access to material resources.

Finally, the chapter engages in a dialogue with Michael Walzer's distributive view. I will show the originality of Walzer's approach compared to other distributive views. Walzer is one of the few distributive authors taking the issue of work seriously, as a fully-fledged issue of justice; he thinks of the problem of work as a problem of inequality in the first place. In the distributive landscape, Walzer's position is the most attentive to issues of labor justice, beyond the *external justice* thesis. He is the only author among the theorists considered thus far who defends the *distributability* thesis – that is, the idea that, at least partially and moderately, work should be included among the *distribuenda*, on a par with other goods. He thus provides valuable resources for a conception of labor justice, even if some shortcomings will be identified.

At the end of the chapter, I will provide a general assessment of the distributive response to the contributive problem.

1. The Luck Egalitarian Model: John Roemer's Market Socialism

In the last few decades, some distributive thinkers sympathetic to socialist views have embraced a specific conception of egalitarianism, known as "luck egalitarianism" (Anderson 1999). A distinctive feature of luck egalitarianism is that it focuses its distributive lens on the distinction between what falls under an individual's control and responsibility, and what is independent from one's will (the "luck"). Bad luck, as it were, is what people should be

compensated for as a matter of justice. Luck egalitarians include a number of well-known authors such as Ronald Dworkin, Richard Arneson, Gerry A. Cohen, and John Roemer, each giving their particular answer to the question of what should be equalized for a distribution to be just²⁹. Some of them have contributed to the “socialist strand” of the luck egalitarian debate on justice (Bertram 2007; Callinicos 2007). In what follows, I will confine my focus to Roemer’s and Arneson’s proposals, since they present more elements of discussion relevant to labor justice, such as the principle of equality of opportunity and market socialism (Roemer) and the controversy over the right to meaningful work (Arneson). I do not enter into the details of the theories, but focus either on some key elements of how they approach the issue of work, or on the implications of their distributive views with respect to work.

From socialist thinkers, one may expect a special commitment to issues of justice at work. After all, from a historical and theoretical perspective, socialism is widely known for having contributed to most political struggles as well as theoretical expositions concerning workers’ rights. Let us now see if that is the case for a socialist thinker who has provided a significant contribution to the contemporary distributive debate on social justice, John Roemer.

1.1. *“What Socialists Want”: Equality of Opportunity*

According to John Roemer, socialists no longer aim towards state ownership of the means of production. Rather, as he states in *A Future for Socialism* (1994), they want equality of opportunity for “three equalities”: (1) self-realization and welfare; (2) political influence; and (3) social status (Roemer 1994, 11). More precisely, the goal is to “maximize the degree of equality of opportunity”, as an “equality of such at a high level”³⁰. Roemer does not say much about the precise content of these “three equalities”, but he asserts that self-realization should be understood as a specific feature of the “Marxist conception of human flourishing”, in the sense proposed by Jon Elster (Elster 1986). Note that Roemer explicitly distances himself here from the Rawlsian conception of “fulfillment of a plan of life”. While Rawls’ idea of pursuing one’s plan of life can include the most diverse activities, like enjoying friends or “counting blades of grass”, Roemer’s self-realization aims at being a more demanding idea, involving a “process of self-transformation that requires struggle” (Roemer 1994, 11). Yet, the meaning of self-realization is left relatively underdetermined – Roemer does not explore the issue further. He uses Jon Elster’s definition of self-realization as a challenging activity that is pursued for an external goal³¹, but does not scrutinize the concept further, for he seems to be mostly interested in the means (equality of opportunity) rather than the goal (self-realization). Note that Elster’s conception of self-realization was developed precisely with reference to work in his article “Self-Realization in Work and Politics” (Elster 1986)³². But in his account,

²⁹ While for Cohen what should be equalized is “access to advantage” (1989), for Richard Arneson it is rather “equal opportunity for welfare” (1990); by contrast, Ronald Dworkin advocates the principle of “equality of resources” (1981) as Roemer does, albeit with some important differences (Roemer 1988).

³⁰ “Socialists want an organization of society that equalize the opportunity for self-realization at a level no lower than that any other organization of society could achieve for everyone.” (Roemer 1994, 13)

³¹ “The central features that turn an activity into a potential vehicle for self-realization are that it has an external goal and that it can be performed more or less well - i.e., the goal can be realized to a higher or lower degree — according to independently given criteria. If an activity is to be an actual vehicle for self-realization, its goal must be of suitable complexity – neither so simple as to produce boredom, nor so difficult as to produce frustration. The activity must offer a *challenge that can be met*.” (Elster 1986, 100)

³² In Elster’s view, the activities that are not defined by some further goal or purpose do not lend themselves to self-realization – this is the case, for example, for spontaneous interpersonal relations, consumption, and drudgery (Elster 1986, 99). It seems thus that work is especially suited to such idea of self-realization. Yet it should be work with some particular features: it

Roemer does not make any explicit reference to this. According to Roemer, what distributive justice should do is provide “opportunities” for self-realization so broadly defined – that is, not provide self-realization and welfare *in themselves*, but *opportunities for* self-realization and welfare. This specification may remind us of Rawls’ strategy for meaningful work – to provide opportunities for meaningful work rather than meaningful work in itself – giving a liberal nuance to Roemer’s view. Indeed, when considered this way, it is hard to see the difference between the Rawlsian idea of self-fulfillment and Roemer’s concept of self-realization, for such a difference is merely asserted and not explained. On the whole, distributive justice for both Rawls and Roemer is essential to ensure goods as a means to getting something valuable. This valuable output is described in different ways: as “pursuing one’s plan of life” and “self-realization”. The “self-transformation” required by the latter is where the difference is supposed to lie. But what does all of this mean with respect to labor justice? As discussed earlier, where Rawls defends the need for *opportunities for meaningful work*, Roemer advocates *equal opportunities for self-realization*. In other words, Roemer advocates equal opportunities for self-transformation through challenging activities. In principle, self-realization is a broader, and more ambitious concept than just that of meaningful work, for it is not restricted to work but can also include activities like “playing football”. But overall, it seems that their views on the subject are not very different, and it may well be the case that their divergence on this point is more terminological than substantive.

The relative indeterminacy of the concept of self-realization and the ways in which distributive justice is expected to affect individuals’ self-fulfillment, is rooted in a liberal concern, namely that no one impose on others their conceptions of welfare and self-realization. In Roemer’s view (as in Dworkin’s), some people may have expensive conceptions of self-realization and welfare: simply put, the costs of their views of self-realization should not be paid by others. The collective cannot be burdened with the costs of the many diverse ways in which people may realize themselves, but rather must ensure equal opportunities for all. For instance, if one’s conception of welfare is that life is worthless unless you “reach the top of Mount Everest on foot”, as in Roemer’s example (Roemer 1994, 12), then it would be unfair to ask the collective to pay for this; rather, a certain amount of resources must be guaranteed equally so as that opportunities to pursue alternative conceptions are ensured. There is, thus, a pluralistic concern shaping Roemer’s view of self-realization, and that justifies his normative focus on what self-realization (which is up to individuals to define) presupposes: *equality of opportunity*. Any other form of equality, in Roemer’s view, would undermine a commitment to individual responsibility. Rawls’ and Roemer’s conceptions of equality of opportunity are both committed to preventing unequal opportunities resulting from one’s social class. However, Roemer’s conception involves a distinction between effort and luck, in a way that Rawls’ apparently does not.

Resources should be equalized in such a way that people are provided with appropriate tools to compete in the labor market on an equal basis – that is, with equal chances to develop their skills through education (see also Roemer 1998). Note that, as Roemer puts it, equality of opportunity for welfare “puts some responsibility on me for choosing welfare-inducing goals that are reasonable” (Roemer 1994, 12). For instance, while arguing for equality of

should be done for an external goal, and it should be such that it can be realized on different levels. The idea is not that of pursuing work “for itself”, as it is in traditional descriptions of self-realization (given the instrumental nature of work), but that it should be done for a purpose ‘beyond’.

opportunity, Roemer divides children into a number of “types” determined by different circumstances: one type consists of “black children, living in the inner city, in single-parent homes with many siblings, whose parent did not graduate from high school”, while another includes “upper-middle-class suburban children living in two-parent homes, with two or fewer siblings, and whose parents both graduated from college” (Roemer 1998, 13). The point is that one should not expect the same level of effort in school from a child of the first type as a child of the second type, because this would mean attributing to the child of the first type the responsibility for the circumstances in which he lives³³. Roemer discusses various examples, determining case by case where the individual responsibility ends and ‘circumstance’ begins. For instance, he addresses the particular case of the academic success of Asian students: they generally come from families that care a lot about effort, he says, and this puts them in a position of advantage with respect to other “normal” students coming from different cultures that do not value much sustained effort. Thus, what should equality of opportunity mean in this case? What kind of compensation should be provided, and to whom? According to Roemer, in this case, the “Asian” element should be included among the “circumstances” for which one should not be deemed responsible (Roemer 1998, 21-22).

I have recalled this example because it is representative of Roemer’s method of addressing the problem of equality and justice: he proposes a case-by-case metric, aimed at assessing *whether a factor fits the box “circumstances” or the box “individual responsibility”*. If one is responsible for an outcome, it is relevant to distributive justice. Roemer argues that resources should be equalized so as to maximize the opportunities of those who suffer from unfavorable circumstances independent from their control and will. This clearly presupposes some objective distinction between circumstance and effort. But where does the responsibility of the individual end, and the circumstances outside of their control begin? Where should we place the bar of responsibility, the boundary of equality?

Such insistence on individual responsibility as a key element of social justice is a constitutive feature of luck egalitarianism. One may be surprised by this, since responsibility is usually a concept associated with liberalism³⁴. One might say that just as Rawls has been called a “reticent socialist” (Edmundson 2017), so Roemer may be deemed a reticent liberal³⁵. Yet, interestingly, the author of *A Future for Socialism* believes that what separates conservatives from socialists is *precisely* the idea of compensation for unwilled unfavorable circumstances. In Roemer’s words:

³³ It is important to draw attention to some distinctions here. First, Roemer distinguishes between *levels* and *degrees* of effort. Obviously, individuals should not be rewarded for extraordinarily high efforts in themselves; the “genius”, for instance, is not the yardstick against which other people’s competing distributions are assessed. Rather, justice should assess the degree of effort. Very different individuals, thus, should not be guaranteed resources on the basis of their *levels* of effort, but rather on their *degrees* of effort. Going back to the earlier example, the child of the first type should be attributed resources in line with the degree of his effort, for it is not comparable with the level of effort that the child of the second type performs. Second, another distinction proposed by Roemer is that between *responsibility* and *accountability*. This is an important distinction because it prevents rewards connected to people’s efforts from being the objects of imputations of some sort. That is, in Roemer’s view, the stress on responsibility would not require that people not be deemed “guilty” and then asked to pay additional costs for their lack (or insufficient degree) of effort. In this respect, Roemer considerably distances himself from Ronald Dworkin (1981), who gives much importance to individuals’ preferences and even makes them accountable for such preferences.

³⁴ See for instance what Gerry A. Cohen says about Ronald Dworkin: he “has, in effect, performed for egalitarianism the considerable service of incorporating within it the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the antiegalitarian right: the idea of choice and responsibility” (Cohen 1989, 933); and Roemer himself: “At the philosophical level, Dworkin’s contribution changed the nature of the discussion in egalitarian theory, because it introduced, as key for that theory, personal responsibility, which had, generally speaking, been important only for right-wing political philosophy” (Roemer 2012, 166).

³⁵ “Some liberals may be pleasantly surprised that I define socialism as a kind of egalitarianism; some socialists will be taken aback, for the notions of class and exploitation are not central to this egalitarian notion.” (Roemer 1994, 6-7)

What distinguishes socialists or leftists from conservatives is, in large part, the matter of deciding what exactly is required to equalize opportunities. Conservatives believe that if there is no discrimination in hiring and everyone has access to education through a public school system or vouchers, then the standard of equality of opportunity is met. Socialists believe that those guarantees only touch the surface of a much larger task. Equality of opportunity requires special compensation or subsidy for those denied access to privilege. Most generally, equality of opportunity requires that people be compensated for handicaps induced by factors over which they have no control. (...) Most socialists and others believe that there is a realm for will, and hence it is important to insert the opportunity clause in ant list of “what socialists want”. (Roemer 1994, 12)

This stress on responsibility is supposed to overcome the shortcomings of traditional socialism, not only on a moral level, but also on a political-economic level. That is, if people are to be held responsible for some things and irresponsible for others, *and if this distinction matters for justice*, then such a boundary between bad brute luck and individual control should be valued in distributive choices. It follows that the kind of inequality that justice has to redress is that which occurs due to no fault nor choice. Whereas acceptable inequalities are a result of one’s deliberate efforts under conditions of equal opportunity, inequalities are unacceptable when they are due to bad luck. Note here the distance we have travelled from Rawls’ claim that inequalities are acceptable only if they go to the benefit of the worst-off. Unsurprisingly, luck egalitarians consider Rawls’ insensitivity to the role of voluntary choices in inequalities problematic (Munoz-Dardé 2015, 473). Besides this commitment to equality, they argue, room for individual responsibility should be maintained as well.

At least two distinctive assumptions of this approach can thus be identified:

- the idea that equality, and particularly equality of opportunity, should be intended as *a problem of boundaries* between the discernable, mutually exclusive areas of responsibility and circumstance: once the boundaries are defined, distributive compensations can be made; and
- the idea that justice should intervene “*before*” people enter the labor market, in the form of “equalization of resources” at the highest level – i.e. skills training – to ensure fair competition, regardless of the circumstances independent from one’s control.

Call these approaches the *boundaries of equality* and the *external* view of justice. Let us address them in turn.

1.1.1. *The Boundaries of Equality*

Most of Roemer’s reflections are centered on what may be called the problem of the boundaries of equality: determining where circumstances “end” and where individual responsibility “begins” is essential for his view of equality. Such boundaries are “genetically” determined: that is, they are identified by providing an assessment of where they come from. The identification of the source of the outcome is taken to be relevant in order to assess whether that outcome is fair. This “genetic approach” presupposes that, first, knowing where an outcome comes from is *possible*, and, second, that knowing this is *desirable* and *especially relevant* for justice, so that we can redress unjust inequalities. Against this genetic fallacy, I offer some arguments.

(i) Not only is it that a clear line between circumstances and efforts cannot be easily drawn, but it is also far from obvious that a distinction can even be discerned at all. The interrelations

between the environment and the individual are so various, complex and difficult to investigate that attempting to draw a definite line between them seems like a pointless effort. Indeed, it is even often thought nowadays that behaviors and attitudes acquired through culture are in some cases likely to be incorporated into genes and transmissible: in a sense, culture turns into nature, and circumstances become internalized by individuals in ways that considerably affect their future actions. Categorizing characteristics as “circumstances” and others as “efforts” supposes that a clear, definite distinction can be genetically established between them, and thus underestimates the extent to which personal dispositions – including inclinations to make efforts – are themselves shaped by individuals’ social *milieu*.

(ii) Even assuming that this distinction were possible, I argue that it would not still not be *desirable* to address the problem this way, for some essential reasons that I identify as follows.

1) *Paternalism*. Assessing case by case what individuals deserve to be compensated for necessarily requires an intrusion in their lives and a form of paternalism. Individuals would be constantly exposed to the pressure of social assessment of their personal attitudes, choices, and behaviors, aimed at determining whether they are truly deserving of this or that compensation. This is undesirable for reasons that Roemer himself would endorse, for this intrusiveness is likely to undermine individuals’ welfare and potential for self-realization. It is hard to believe that a satisfactory understanding of welfare could be compatible with constant intrusion into a person’s life, aimed at determining whether they are deserving of compensation. In any case, this would at least involve a very questionable idea of welfare and self-realization.

2) *Pressure to perform*. The insistence on efforts and rewards would align Roemer’s egalitarianism with the “culture of performance” associated with capitalist culture (Sennett 1999), leading individuals to have “performance anxieties” and to be subject to a sort of “permanent test”. Roemer, a socialist thinker, appears to be at ease in perpetuating a culture that one would expect him to reject. Also, this would be wrong for reasons that Roemer himself would endorse, because high levels of stress due to pressure to perform could reasonably be thought of as harming individuals’ welfare, unless “welfare” means simply owning the goods necessary to survive, which does not seem not to be Roemer’s idea (1994). A “war of all against all” scenario would be the most likely to follow from this. That is, such an approach turns the already existing performance-based world into a theory of social justice, turning an undesirable reality into a desirable norm.

3) *Behaviors or structures? Justice as “suspicion”*. This may be referred to as a *performance-based idea of justice*, with the corollary of *justice as suspicion of fraud*. The fundamental question of justice as suspicion of fraud is: *are you really entitled to such reward?* Rather than: *what should be done in order for society to be fair?* Once again, as in Rawls’ account of reciprocity, the stress is placed on *whether people actually deserve things*, rather than on how to make sure that no one is arbitrarily excluded from valuable goods. The resulting conception of justice scrutinizes people’s behaviors and elaborates indefinitely questionable assessments over them. Also, one would assume that a kind of authority must make such judgements – but how can they be “objective” at all? They would need clearly defined metrics, and objective parameters of assessment; those provided by Roemer are still too generic (once again, it is far from obvious where the boundary between “circumstances” and “effort” would lie). The authority that would dispense such judgements should necessarily be *super partes*, not itself liable to biased judgments– which in our real world seems difficult to realize. On the whole, this approach

prevents us from seeing what really counts: social structures and their role in the reproduction of inequality, leading us to focus our attention on individuals' behaviors instead (Young 1990; 2003; 2010). This way, not only they are paternalistic, for they moralistically scrutinize individuals' choices in the name of equality, but they also overlook what is really at stake: fairness of social structures, which are the very sources of the reproduction of unjust inequalities. Equalizing resources on the grounds of behavioral boundaries determined case by case, would not affect the source of such inequality.

4) *Social inequality*. The problem with the case-by-case assessment of whether individuals deserve to be compensated or not is that the assessments also tend to convey evaluations on people's worth. People who make less effort for all sorts of reasons, or who simply do not meet Roemer's requirements for reward, would end up feeling less worthwhile, and are thus likely to suffer from social stigmatization. This would foster social hierarchies where some are seen as more worthwhile than others, making some feel like "inferiors". Roemer's idea of equality of opportunity is hardly compatible with an idea of social equality, where all have equal moral worth (Anderson 1999). It fails to appropriately respect people's statuses as adult, equal moral agents (see also Anderson 1999).

5) *Skills and wage do not simply match*. What the sociologist Everett Hughes called "the process of finding a place in competition with others" (Hughes 2017 [1958], 31) is affected by a number of arbitrary factors and cumulative advantages and disadvantages which are not sufficiently accounted for by Roemer's notion of equality of opportunity. Consider, for instance, the following account:

I think it is incontrovertible that a key reform necessary to achieve the equality of opportunity desired by socialists is massively improved education for the children of the poor and working class. *Only through education* can the difference in opportunities faced by them and the children of the well-off be eradicated; *only when skills become less unequally distributed, because of education, will wage differentials narrow significantly*. Reaching a consensus to devote the required amount of resources to this kind of education will require a massive change in outlook of the citizenry of every large, heterogeneous country. (Roemer 1994, 110, emphasis added).

Here we find the view that equality of opportunity is a matter of equal access to education: once skills are equally distributed, everyone will find her place in the labor market. However, this account tends to naturalize the relationship between wage and skills, as if there is a perfect match between them. But such a match cannot be simply assumed. Indeed, in our world, wages do not merely mirror people's skills. There is a large empirical literature showing that ability plays no role in explaining the patterns that prevail in determining wage differentials (see Thaler 1989). Consider the gender pay gap (Folbre 1994): recent data from Eurostat 2016 show that women in Europe earn on average 16% less than men, with the maximum at 21,5% and 21,0% in Germany and the UK respectively, and the minimum at 5% in Romania and Italy (Eurostat 2016). As for the US, "women's median weekly earnings for full-time work were \$770 in 2017 compared with \$941 for men" (Hegewisch, Phil, Williams-Baron 2018). Studies have shown that occupational segregation and the "gender hour gap" – the phenomenon that women are more likely to be employed in less remunerative jobs and are more likely to take part-time jobs than men – play a crucial role in reproducing the phenomenon of unequal wages based on gender (Eurostat 2016). This is also true for ethnicity, as is well-documented in Europe (Longhi and Brynin 2017) and in the US as well – the 2017 gap between black and Hispanic women and white men is even worse, as the former earn \$657 and \$603 respectively

and the latter \$770 per week (Hegewisch, Phil, Williams-Baron 2018)³⁶. From a broader perspective, consider the inequality of markets on a global scale. An average person working in a developing economy (China for instance) is earning more money today than in the last four decades. A person from a middle-class background is more likely to earn high wages than a person from a working-class background. The problem is that these differences in income *cannot be said to derive merely from skills and productive capacity, but also from other arbitrary factors such as place of birth and gender*. In a recent study by Michael Clemens and Hannah Postel, wages of Haitians were examined after the devastating earthquake of 2010: they found that the income of Haitian agricultural workers who migrated to America in the immediate aftermaths rose by 1400% compared with those who remained in the island (Clemens and Postel 2017). Unfortunately, Roemer under-estimates the normative relevance of this point. It is not the case that women, racialized people, and people born in poorly developed countries make universally weaker efforts at work than men, whites, and people born in more developed countries, because, for instance, they are less talented than them. The data available on pay gaps based on workers' status leaves little doubt that wages do not just reflect workers' skills; other kinds of considerations play a role in determining wage differentials.

More broadly, beyond educational opportunities, it should be recalled that “the determination of the precise task that most individuals perform within the larger class of occupations lies in chiefly local, temporary, and fortuitous circumstances” (North 1926, 235, cit. in Hughes 2017 [1958], 29). If all have equal opportunities, and the impact of circumstances is believed to be minimized, one may be tempted to think that the place that people occupy in the social hierarchies – and more precisely in the division of labor – *simply reflects their actual capacities*. Such an assumption would entail that “those who get the better positions do so because they made better choices and those who get worse positions made worse choices. As a result, those who are in such positions will deserve them” (Gomberg 2007, 25; see also Gomberg 1995).

1.1.2. *Equality of Opportunity as the External Justice Thesis: The Gap Between Skills and Work*

Related to his concern for individual responsibility and his belief in the good of competition is the fact that Roemer's notion of equality intervenes in the “before” of work, so to speak, as in the *external justice* view. This point is acknowledged by Roemer himself in his book *Equality of Opportunity* (1998):

There is, in the notion of equality of opportunity, a “before” and an “after”: before the competition starts, opportunities must be equalized, by social intervention if need be, but after it begins, individuals are on their own. The different views of equal opportunity can be categorized according to where they place the starting gate which separates “before” from “after”. (Roemer 1998, 2)

The “before” of equality of opportunity immediately translates into the *external justice* thesis. On this view, what should be done is to fix things before people enter jobs: then, once the gate has been crossed, it is up to the individuals. As Roemer himself puts it:

³⁶ “A large scholarly literature exists explaining the existence and persistence of the pay gap, but gender and labor scholars agree that a significant portion of the gap is due to occupational sex segregation. Estimations range from 35% to 89%, with some consensus that approximately two thirds of the pay gap is due to occupational sex segregation. In short, women tend to be employed in female-dominated occupations, like teaching, nursing, and social work, in which wages are lower, and men tend to be employed in male-dominated occupations, like engineering, medicine, and law, in which wages are higher.” (Hinze 2007, 617)

Indeed, an opportunity is a vague thing. It is not a school or a plate of nourishing food or a warm abode, but is, rather, a capacity which is brought into being by properly using that school, food, and hearth. (...) *What society owes its members, under an equal-opportunity policy, is equal access; but the individual is responsible for turning that access into actual advantage by the application of effort.* (Roemer 1998, 24, emphasis added)

The passage quoted earlier (Roemer 1994, 110) clearly shows Roemer's commitment to education as crucial to his notion of equal opportunity. Yet it should be noted that there is no guarantee that, once training has been provided on an equal basis to all, there is equal opportunity. Consider the phenomenon of *overqualification*, which shows that the match between skills and jobs is far from obvious (Brynin 2002; Green and Yu Zhu 2010), as well as the striking insufficiency of equality of opportunity in education. In many countries and especially in certain sectors, people hold undergraduate degrees, masters degrees, PhDs and do not find jobs, or find jobs below their reasonable expectations and skills; positions are low in number and thus they are forced to do things that do not count to them as self-realization – at least not in the way Roemer thinks of it (recall that activities are to be “challenging”). The transnational category that Guy Standing has called “the precariat” (Standing 2011) is particularly affected by this phenomenon. Even though certainly valuable, equal opportunities in skills training are unable to address this gap between skills and work. Therefore, Roemer's view assumes a kind of inherent fairness in the way the market allocates jobs to individuals, and a sort of blind trust for competition as the best mechanism for allocating positions. This disconnect between the world of education and the world of work may be considered a characteristic feature of contemporary Western societies. One would have expected Roemer to provide at least a problematization of this assumption, rather than to have “blind trust” in equality of education.

Roemer's insistence on skills and effort as the ground for deciding between competing distributions is at risk of conveying the view that once people are trained, the tasks of justice are complete. On this view, the gaze of justice, so to speak, stops at the door of work, for it suffices that all have equal access to training. Shortage of desirable labor positions is not even seen as a problem. The existence itself of positions like “janitor” does not raise any concern (see Gomberg 2007). In Roemer's equal opportunity world, if one does not find a job, or the best that she can do is the janitor, is entirely up to her. Despite the opportunities, it will inevitably turn out that she has not put enough effort. None of the excluded will ever have put enough effort. Therefore, the logical endpoint of this narrative is that one deserves her place. It is hard to see how the unemployed could not be seen as “deserving poor” in such a context, as in the old Victorian rhetorics³⁷.

However, note that it is not merely a matter of insufficiency. It is that opportunities for self-realization through education do not affect the structures of questionable inequalities: not only they do not change them, they do not even see them as questionable and thus they tend to implicitly certify their fairness. Equality of opportunity takes social hierarchies for granted,

³⁷ Paul Gomberg has effectively highlighted this point: “He does not address what causes the unemployment rate to be higher or lower, thus hiding social forces, institutions, or policies that cause a certain percentage to be unemployed. *By hiding the causal role of these institutions and policies and focusing only on the people who are unemployed as causing their own unemployment, the statement that the unemployed have only themselves to blame tends to make the current state of things look as if it is justified.* (...) In this egalitarian society, our philosophers would judge that those who are in disadvantaged positions are there as a result of their own autonomous choices. (...) That is why I say that the role of Roemer's use of “autonomous choices” is ideological. By hiding the role of social institutions in creating positions such as “janitor,” it tends to justify the social order that would result if society had a level playing field.” (Gomberg 2007, 24–25, emphasis added)

particularly labor hierarchies. Yet if, as in Roemer's case, concerns for self-realization are said to distinguish the socialist view from the liberal-egalitarian view (centered on the fulfillment of plans of life), one would expect that structures that impede self-realization be seen as a part of the problem. Some underlying assumptions and implicit conclusions of this view can be identified:

- equal opportunity is essentially a problem of skills, for injustice lies in the unequal way skills are distributed among people. Once people have equal access to skill training, the tasks of justice are accomplished, because the match between people and positions is based on the level of skills acquired;
- competition is an inherently fair way to distribute the relatively few positions available in the labor market and to think of the organization of work itself, and thus it does not require any normative scrutiny;
- there is nothing questionable in the fact that the few desired jobs available are reserved for just a few people once the "playing field" (Roemer 1998) has been levelled;
- if one does not improve their skills as competition requires, then they deserve to be paid less and to occupy lower rungs of the labor 'ladder'.

These more or less implicit assumptions tend to shape Roemer's discourse, being assumed by his positions and left unproblematized. One may ask how a person could self-realize in Roemer's sense, if the desired positions are few and if competition involves, *by definition*, winners and losers. Trivially, this means that some would end up self-realizing while others would not. The normative connection between equality, competition, and self-realization is clearly a problematic one, for competition entails *selective self-realization*; or "self-realization for the few". In this framework, one would hardly deny that "equality of opportunity is not really an egalitarian doctrine at all, or that it is a myth, promulgated in order to make unacceptable inequalities seem acceptable" (Scanlon 2018, 40). This is true also with respect to status, which Roemer includes among the desiderata of socialism. It is hard to see how one occupying a low rung on the labor ladder would have equal opportunities for social status. Yet wasn't equality for self-realization and welfare, status and political influence what socialists were looking for?

1.2. *Market Socialism: Efficiency Plus Equality*

Let us turn to the institutional realizations of distributive justice in Roemer's view. As advocates of market socialism, Richard Arneson and John Roemer's views are shaped by a common interest – that of keeping together concerns of *equality* with concerns of *efficiency*. In their views, market socialism is expected to ensure that the liberal virtues of the market be compatible with egalitarian concerns³⁸. This requires socialists to be "eclectic in their attitude towards property relations" (Roemer 1994, 6-7). For Roemer (I will consider Arneson in §2), this means that the direct control of companies by the state is not necessary for socialist purposes. On this view, it is a mistake to believe that the public control of the means of production is the same as state ownership: "public ownership has been viewed as the *sine qua non* of socialism, but this judgement is based on a false inference" (Roemer 1994, 20)³⁹.

³⁸ This tendency to rethink economic institutions so as to include heterogeneous elements and to create hybrid forms, containing both capitalist and socialist elements, has been defended also by Erik Olin Wright (2010).

³⁹ This idea goes back to Alec Nove's *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, which indicated central planning precisely as the "unfeasible" form of socialism (Arnold 1994).

Centrally planned economies, Roemer argues, fail because they suppress elements of competition without which innovation is not possible – and without innovation, standards of living necessary for people’s welfare do not improve⁴⁰. In Roemer’s view, nothing guarantees that state control of property would be better at getting “what socialists want”. As Jon Elster observes, “an argument for market socialism, as distinct from state socialism, is that the threat of bankruptcy, like the threat of war, concentrates the minds wonderfully” (Elster 1986, 121). To say “market” is to say “competition”, and competition is highly regarded by market socialists. Competition pushes companies and individuals to do their best, and this is expected to lead to positive outcomes *even* for self-realization. From this perspective, efficiency is a “*requirement* for self-realization” (Elster 1986, 124, emphasis added; see also Arnold 1994, 42).

In order for this to be possible, central planning has to be left aside, and the market should come under the socialist agenda:

The methods of Soviet planning were ineffective, and worse, because they did not use markets as a way of decentralizing millions of small decisions. Ironically, perhaps, the most effective planning requires the use of markets. What are not planned in this vision of market socialism are the composition of output, the prices of goods, and the distribution of labor; planned is just the composition of investment. (Roemer 1996, 295)

Public intervention in the economy is thus present but limited to investments – the government should take part in decisions over the ‘pattern’ and quantity of investments. Such decisions would not be realized through a centrally organized “command system” like in Soviet-like planning. Rather, political parties should include in their programs proposals about the direction that investments would take if they were elected. Thus, the people would exercise a sort of indirect control over these decisions through political elections. Collective control over “the use of savings in society” (Roemer 1996, 291) would thus occur exclusively in this sense, at the broad level of democratic elections, rather than at the level of the workplace as in the democratic economy model (see for instance Schweickhart 1980) and in most market socialist frameworks. However, as Arnold stresses, while it is perhaps the primary reason to favor the market, economic efficiency is not the only reason to do so. Another desideratum that can be ensured by the market is *freedom of occupational choice* (Arnold 1994, 43):

In a society in which most of the means of production have been nationalized, the workers would likely be forced to deal with the bureaucrat-managers just as they are forced to deal with capitalists under capitalism. This, coupled with management’s directive to maximize profits, creates the structural conditions for the exploitation of the workers by bureaucratic elites, and it bodes ill for ameliorating alienation. (Arnold 1994, 46)

This shift from the private owner to the state as the buyer of labor, would no longer be needed in a market socialist system. Everyone would be a “little capitalist”, as it were, thanks to the widespread distribution of “coupons”. In Roemer’s coupon-economy, every citizen receives an equal number of coupons to get stocks in enterprises; however, no one is allowed to buy or sell such coupons in exchange for currency, nor can they be inherited. The stock would entitle

⁴⁰ “The failure of the Soviet-type economies was due to the conjunction of three of their characteristics: (1) the allocation of most goods by an administrative apparatus under which producers were not forced to compete with each other, (2) direct control of companies by political units, and (3) noncompetitive, nondemocratic politics.” (Roemer 1994, 37); “(...) without the competition that is provided by markets – both domestic and international – no business enterprise is forced to innovate, and without the motivation of competition, innovation, at least at the rate that market economies engender, does not occur.” (Roemer 1994, 44).

the citizen-shareholders to share in the profits of the companies (Roemer 1994, 48-50). This way, “in a sense”, as Wonnell observes, “everyone will be a capitalist, although no one will be a very large capitalist” (Wonnell 1998, 38).

Roemer is thus a heterodox socialist. In his view, liberal elements – competition, the market, anti-statalism, managerial hierarchy, free occupational choice – co-exist with egalitarian concerns within a “coupon-economy”, which aims to prevent the accumulation of profits in few hands. As seen earlier, in one sense, this is also Rawls’ concern: property-owning democracy is precisely supposed to *prevent the concentration of capital in few hands*, for that would lead to excessive inequalities (which are undesirable for social stability, and which are to be justified by the difference principle in any case). And yet Roemer’s view tends to be more demanding than Rawls’ – his coupon-economy allows workers to *share in profits*, rather than to merely benefit from distributive allocations, and this would eliminate the “non-laboring class” of owners. This point can be better appreciated by comparing Roemer’s model with Rawls’ property-owning democracy.

1.3. *Market Socialism versus Property-Owning Democracy*

As seen earlier, property-owning democracy provides equal amounts of capital (both “economic” and “human”) to all, in order to prevent small numbers of people from concentrating wealth so as to threaten social stability. Even if workers help produce goods and services which bring about profits to owners, nothing in Rawls’ theory justifies us in saying that such profits are to be shared with the workers.

Thus, there is an important difference between market socialism and property-owning democracy. This difference lies in alternative conceptions of profit sharing and ownership of the means of production. In principle, in Rawls’ POD nothing prevents owners from earning disproportionately high incomes thanks to exceptional profits, since POD allows profits concentration but requires widespread dispersal of capital (and the satisfaction of the difference principle). By contrast, in Roemer’s market socialism, the means of production can – and indeed, should – be privately owned by all citizens in the form of coupons. Every citizen takes part in this ownership, and the profits that this brings about are shared. As a result, profits generated by the companies would no longer “go to a small fraction of the citizenry but will be divided, after taxes, more or less equally among all adult citizens, taking a form that Oskar Lange (1938) has called the social dividend” (Roemer 1996, 292). Thus, each citizen in a market socialist society would receive income from three sources: *wage income*, *interest from savings*, and the *social dividend*. In Roemer’s view, *wage income* would be largely determined by the market, according to one’s skill and labor time, whereas *the social dividend* would be “approximately equal across households” (Roemer 1996, 292). Therefore, wages would not be equalized in market socialism; they would be largely determined by the market, in the same way as in capitalist economies. Equality intervenes at the level of the social dividend:

The social dividend will be a form of guaranteed income, or what some European writers have called a universal grant. I prefer not to call it a grant, since it is not a gift, which “grant” connotes; it is that part of the national income which is not distributed as wages or interest but which belongs to the people as owners of the means of production. Of course, a society such as the one I am describing might decide to distribute profits in some other way to people, such as in proportion to the value of labor they have expended, but I personally would oppose that proposal. (Roemer 1996, 292)

According to Roemer, inequality would persist in market socialism, but he believes that it would be less high than that under capitalism. People would still have differential wages because of their different labor contributions and the competitive nature of the labor market, as well as because of different money-saving behaviors, but *the part of income resulting from corporate profits would be equalized*. All citizens would be entitled to profits, which by contrast under capitalism are reserved for a small class of owners (Roemer 1996, 292-293)⁴¹. As Roemer explicitly says, this model relies upon “the successes of capitalism”, while deviating from it in certain ways.

One may ask why redistribution would not take place under self-managed companies, as it is imagined under most market socialist proposals; that is, why does Roemer prefer an *ex post* general reallocation of profits, instead of a redistribution of profits at the level of the company directly controlled by workers? The answer is that in his model, the company “belongs to everyone” since “every household depends upon each company as a source of part of its income, via the social dividend” (Roemer 1996, 293). Restricting the redistribution of profits to the level of the company, would lead to inequities across workers at different companies, along with concerns about profit maximization which, according to Roemer, cannot be dealt with but through a hierarchical structure.

Thus, the difference to Rawls is quite important. As seen earlier, Rawls neither defends nor rejects socialized ownership of the means of production, whatever such ownership may mean, but rather asks that every citizen is allocated equal amounts of economic and human capital, whose nature is essentially different to shares in stocks or social dividends. Huge amounts of profits would not be redistributed proportionally, as in Roemer’s model, whereas equal amounts of capital would be allocated to all. Rawls’ picture is thus much closer to proposals like the universal basic income (associated with welfare provisions), than to market socialism.

As for “human capital”, note that Roemer’s framework may be said to require human capital dispersal in the form of equality of opportunity in education, which is an essential strand of market socialism (see the paragraphs above). From this perspective, Rawls’ POD is very close to the Universal Basic Income formula (see §4 below), except for the inclusion of “human capital” into the allocative framework, whereas Roemer’s model considers together markets with the social ownership of the means of production *and* concerns over the allocation of profits that they produce (Wonnell 1998, 38). Thus Roemer seems to fit somewhere in between Rawls’ POD and traditional socialism, for he is more demanding than POD (because of profit sharing) and less ambitious than other forms of socialism (because there is no inclusion of the self-managed company). Note that market socialism can be intended, in this framework, as a counterbalance to the shortcomings of equality of opportunity, even if only in distributive terms. The idea of equality of opportunity is compatible with highly unequal rewards, but the social dividend mitigates possible excessive inequalities.

1.4. Roemer’s “Managerial Socialism”

⁴¹ “Substantial inequality will continue to exist in this society, due primarily to the differential wages that people will earn and also, to some extent, to their differential savings behavior. What will be equalized is that part of income due to corporate profits. The income distribution will consequently be far more equal than in most, if not all, capitalist economies - even without further intervention to soften the wage differentials that will exist in a competitive labor market.” (Roemer 1996, 293)

Roemer's relatively radical distributive views do not extend to the world of work itself. His model does not require any restructuring of companies themselves or, more broadly, of labor relations. Roemer comes apart from traditional socialism as well as from other market socialists (for instance Pierson 1995; Schweickhart 1980; Miller 1990) in his acceptance of the hierarchical structure of the division of labor (Roemer 1994; 1996; Wonnell 1998). There are thus no requirements for economic democracy or worker-management in Roemer's proposal. The division between managers and executors is maintained, never called into question, and, even advocated as preferable to more democratic solutions (Roemer 1994). At most, workers' participation in economic decision-making takes place through normal democratic elections at the level of civil society. This is, in fact, not very different from what currently happens in Western democracies.

The first reasons that Roemer gives for his rejection of workplace democracy is *efficiency*: worker-managed companies are said to be less inclined to take risks, thereby preventing profit-maximization. Hierarchical companies, by contrast, ensure profit-maximization:

Firms will be managed by managers whose goal will be to maximize profits, at going prices. That is, the firm manager will try to hire labor and produce output of that variety and quality which will maximize the long-run profits of the firm. Firm managers will either be elected by workers or appointed by boards of directors (...). What is important, however, is that managers try to profit-maximize. Labor will be hired on labor markets, and wages will be set by supply and demand, in the market. (Roemer 1996, 291)

Despite Roemer's claims, he does not seem to be supported by the empirical research. There is evidence that worker-managed companies are not necessarily less open to risk-taking and profit-maximization. Take the case of Mondragon cooperatives, which are forced to compete with other cooperatives (Satz 1996, 79-80) while workers engage in forms of "mutual monitoring" among themselves. These cooperatives do not require any hierarchical control by managers, but they do increase efficiency. (Satz 1996, 80; Bowles and Gintis 1993; Johnson and Whyte 1977). Indeed, the claim that managerial companies perform better than labor-managed ones has yet to be empirically tested (Satz 1996, 80; Marglin 1974). There is little evidence that efficiency *necessarily* requires hierarchy. Thus, efficiency may not be a reason to prefer managerial to worker-managed workplaces. Besides this, one may argue that efficiency is not the only value that we should care about⁴².

Another reason that Roemer provides to justify his "managerial socialism" is that it is better to make few changes from the status quo rather than many changes at once, because "an organism with one mutation is more likely to survive than one in which two mutations occur simultaneously" (Roemer 1994, 122). Against this biological analogy it can be said that the principle "one change is better than two" is not always true in the social world: on the contrary, very often one change cannot be effective if other changes do not happen (Satz 1996, 79). This seems to be particularly true with respect to labor justice, because changes merely concerning wages and pay do not fix problems that go beyond the economic sphere, such as occupational segregation, status-biased hiring and socially necessary hard work. Since they are internally complex, for they involve a number of dimensions, such problems require multidimensional

⁴² "Indentured servitude, the violation of workers' basic interests in health and safety, sexual and racial discrimination, harassment, and forms of work which diminish human capacities and lifespans are rightly rejected and condemned, even where such practices would increase productive efficiency. Why should we think that productive efficiency, even when we can tack on to it redistributive material equality, is the *sole* virtue of an economic arrangement?" (Satz 1996, 80).

responses – which, in other words, is antithetical to the principle “one change is better than two”. What multidimensionality means is precisely that more changes are better than single changes, and further that one change cannot actually be effective if other changes do not occur as well. I will argue for this in detail in Chapter V.

Therefore, given these considerations, Roemer’s rejection of workplace democracy in favor of managerial market socialism is not compelling. Indeed, on this point Rawls seems to be more forward-looking. Whereas Rawls explicitly acknowledges that having neglected the issue of workplace democracy in his theory represents a major difficulty (Rawls 2001), Roemer is not interested at all in changing the structure of the workplace and its internal division of labor. In this way, Roemer provides a narrow conception of socialism restricted to aspects of income and education.

It is interesting to note that, *pace* Roemer, there could even be distributive reasons to opt for self-managed companies. Consider, for instance, Le Grand and Estrin’s observations:

The distribution of income between people of different skills within each enterprise becomes a matter for internal debate and vote under self-management. (...) While the outcome will still reflect to some extent the market position of those with special skills, it is likely to be more egalitarian than pertains in capitalist firms. In particular, it seems unlikely that the very high salaries and other perks accorded to themselves by top managers would survive open scrutiny and democratic vote by other employees. (Le Grand and Estrin 1989, 171)

In Roemer’s account, this is not accounted for. Wage justice is not a matter of internal consultation, because no democratization of the company is required; wage, as seen earlier, is entirely determined by the market, in that it is supposed to mirror one’s actual skills and “productive capacity”.

Problems like occupational segregation, stratified self-realization, the division of labor between those who conceive and those who execute, the power gap along the labor hierarchy, and more broadly what I have referred to as “contributive inequality” in the Introduction, are not part of the picture. Thus, profit sharing and coupon-economy do not necessarily entail fairer labor relations and fairer structures of work. *Roemer advocates a “managerial market socialism”* (Roemer, 118) *where equality is a matter of endowments allotted, not of organizational structures and contributive patterns.* On this point, Roemer disagrees with other market socialists, like David Schweickhart and Richard Arneson, who defend economic democracy. Problems of work are only seen from the perspective of stocks, profits, and ownership. This is also the reason why Roemer does not even take into consideration the possibility of considering unpaid work as a form of labor that raises normative issues. He only takes into consideration formally recognized work – the so-called “official economy”. And, normative considerations on equality are restricted to the allocative side of the story. This “distributization” of labor issues leads us back to the failures of the *derivative* thesis.

1.5. *Wage or Profits? The Place of Economic Justice*

And yet, what consequences does market socialism entail for labor justice? In Chapter I (§4), I answered this question with respect to POD, questioning Rawls’ assumption that POD would improve the negative effects of the division of labor. I showed that, despite Rawls’ assumptions, there is no necessary connection between distributive changes introduced by POD and improvements in the division of labor, except for the principle of real free

occupational choice allowed by freedom from material need. Here, something similar could be said about Roemer's model: his market socialism is expected to co-exist with a fundamental persistence of old forms of labor organization.

Nonetheless, even though neither Rawls' POD nor Roemer's market socialism provide effective resources to rethink work and the division of labor, both present some elements that can be utilized for a conception of labor justice. To recall, Rawls' POD economic thesis provided the basis for a principle of equal freedom from material need for real free occupational choice. POD can be usefully thought of as providing the material security necessary for people to really exercise their freedom when searching for a job. That is, material equality substantiates the principle of free occupational choice. Are there elements of this also in Roemer's distributive framework?

As seen earlier, given the three axes of wage income, savings, and the social dividend, market socialism intervenes only on the last axis, while wage differences lie essentially untouched, being left largely determined by the market and by mechanisms already at play in capitalist economies (I leave aside the issue of savings.) Were we to make explicit the normative ground underlying this, wage differentials could be said to correspond to the principle "to each according to one's contribution". Roemer believes that wages reflect different productive capacities. After all, no one among the distributive thinkers considered so far has called wages into question. In Roemer's framework, there is a distinction between wages and profits, and thus the role of work as a producer of value is indirectly recognized as part of the concerns of justice. Despite the fact that considerations of wage justice are lacking in Roemer's framework, there is a growing literature on whether wages differentials should be equalized or reduced, showing that further consideration should be given to the subject (see for instance Thaler 1989; Heath 2018; Scanlon 2018). Roemer believes that the market should have the last word on wages, but it has been observed that "markets are structurally unable to deliver "just" wages, according to any everyday-moral understanding of what justice requires in cooperative interactions" (Heath 2018, 4). If Roemer treats the market as "a system of natural justice", it is no surprise that this grounds a presumption in favor of the distributive pattern that it generates (Heath 2018, 2). However, despite this striking, and perhaps unjustified lack of critical scrutiny of the 'wage side of the story', Roemer's naturalization of wage differentials is somewhat counterbalanced by his concerns for the redistribution of social dividends.

Roemer's concerns for economic justice are focused on the part of the social product that exceeds investments and savings: the *social dividend*. Unlike traditional forms of socialism, the choice is no longer between two mutually exclusive modes of production – that is, the early stages of communism, characterized by the amount of labor as a standardized measure of reward regardless of individuals' differences, versus communism, which does not dismiss each person's individuality (as in Marx' *Critique of the Gotha Programme*). In Roemer's revised socialism, by contrast, wage differentials determined by the market and equality through the social dividend *can co-exist*. Translating this into a normative language, the social dividend could be said to correspond to a principle of "equal access to socially produced wealth". Via the social dividend, each person is entitled to an equal share of profits produced by society as a whole. This way, the wealth that the social division of labor produces ceases to be reserved for just a few owners, and becomes a matter of citizenship. In Roemer's view, efficiency would

not be sacrificed: wealth for investments would still be available, for the social dividend would be the remaining part, after these costs have been deduced.

Importantly, in Roemer's view, if wages are by definition dependent on one's labor, the social dividend is *an entitlement attached to citizenship*, just like civil and political rights. Roemer's idea can be seen as providing the basis for what I have called a principle of *equal access to socially produced wealth*. This principle goes one step further than the principle of equal freedom from material need, since that principle was exclusively meant to provide the material basis for real free occupational choice. While fundamental, freedom from material need far from exhausts the economic-distributive requirements of labor justice. The economic-distributive dimension of labor justice should be seen as involving not merely the "before", i.e. equal freedom from material need and mechanisms of prevention against excessive accumulation, but also the "after" (or the "meantime") of labor justice. The "after" has to do both with *wage justice* (which may be traced back to a principle of fair access to the outcomes of one's contributions, even though there is no concern of this kind in Roemer's account), and with how profits are shared (the principle of equal access to socially produced wealth) – i.e. citizens' entitlement to a portion of the wealth produced by social cooperation as a whole (where this also includes symbolic, immaterial wealth).

The social dividend appears to be an innovative contribution to the normative debate on distributive justice⁴³. It extends the scope of redistribution beyond the usual spheres, extending the normative gaze so as to include the wealth generated by of social cooperation as a whole. The product that economic units create is not seen as a purely private matter. On this view, social cooperation produces wealth that ought be socially shared. Subsequently, despite the "managerial" character of his socialism when it comes to the way organizations are structured, Roemer's social dividend would indeed considerably reduce the relative strength of the not-laboring class of owners. Instead of being monopolized by capital owners, capital returns would be more widely spread than in a traditional capitalist system. In this model, the lack of a non-laboring class taking the returns of capital is thus expected to remove "one major source of material inequality found in free enterprise systems" (Arnold 1994, 60).

It is not clear what effects this would produce in terms of labor justice. Having access to a wider share of the social product may increase workers' bargaining power, but these increased material means would not be accompanied by increased voice or organizational openness to workers' control in the company. The economic-distributive dimension of labor justice would not be accompanied by concerns for democratic-political change. Therefore, one may conclude that Roemer's market socialism intervenes in the labor market by reducing the relative distributive impact of owners, while leaving intact the hierarchical structures of organizations. Even if profits are more equally shared, concerns for equality do not extend to the division of labor itself.

1.6. *From Work to Property: a "Distributive" Notion of Exploitation*

One might expect that, as a socialist, Roemer would be very concerned with exploitative work relations. After all, the Marxist tradition in which he places himself is distinctively characterized by a critical attitude towards exploitative labor relations. But this is not the case. Not only does Roemer not agree with the traditional Marxist conception of exploitation, for

⁴³ This idea is not invented by Roemer – he has systematically developed the intuition of Oscar Lange.

he rejects the theory of labor value (Roemer 1982; 1994; for a criticism see Carchedi 1998), he also thinks that exploitation as a concept is not particularly significant.

The idea of exploitation based on the theory of labor value involves some difficulties in identifying the exact quantity of labor performed in order to assess whether exploitation occurs or not (for Roemer and other thinkers, the system of computation proposed by Marx is hard to defend for a number of reasons). Besides this, it also takes socialists away from their “real goals”, and is not necessary for pursuing such goals (see also Roemer 1996, 63). Therefore, rather than merely rejecting the concept of exploitation in itself, Roemer reconceptualizes it by shifting the focus *from work to property relations as the core of exploitation* (Roemer 1982; 1996; for a criticism see Reiman 1987). In this alternative conception, exploitation occurs when inequalities in endowments give an advantage to some in the distribution of commodities. As Roemer himself stresses, “we should not search for the cause of exploitation in the Marxian sense in the labor process or at the point of production, but in the distribution of property. The call for the abolition of exploitation is a call for an egalitarian distribution of resources in the external world” (Roemer 1996, 3). A relevant consequence for us is that the focus on labor is no longer necessary for exploitation to occur (Roemer 1985, 265; Fleurbaey 2014, 653)⁴⁴. As Roemer argues,

Marxists have often emphasized the coercion of the worker by the capitalist at the point of production, as it occurs at the locus of expropriation of surplus value. According to the property relations definition, the *key locus of coercion is not at the point of production, but in the maintenance of property relations*. The struggle at the point of production is, I think, of second order in importance; it is the struggle over the terms of a contract. (Roemer 1996, 62, emphasis added)

Unlike Reiman (1987), who criticizes this “distributive” notion of exploitation as overlooking exploitative unpaid labor (Reiman 1987), Roemer argues that enforcement does not account for exploitation, rather one can be exploited merely *because of the unfair initial distribution of property rights*.⁴⁵ Note that this distributive account of socialist concerns in Roemer’s work, would fall under Marx’s criticism of “vulgar socialism”⁴⁶.

The distributive interpretation of exploitation may resonate with what I have called the POD economic capital thesis (Chapter I, §4.2). To recall, according to this thesis, allocating equal amounts of capital to all would provide them with real free occupational choice, because of their achieved freedom from material need. Roemer’s distributive notion of exploitation can

⁴⁴ “The property relations definition of exploitation gives a different explanation of the cause of exploitation from the labor-theory-of-value definition. Marxists have often maintained that production as opposed to distribution is key in causing exploitation. On the contrary, the property relations definition insists it is distribution of the means of production which is the cause of exploitation, not what goes on in production. Indeed, the same relations of production, of one agent hiring another and earning profits from his labor, can be either exploitative or not, depending on the underlying distribution of productive assets (...). It is even possible to generate exploitation with no relationship in production between producers. Exploitation can be mediated entirely through the trade of produced goods. In short, I have maintained that Marxists can give no justification describing exploitation as the expropriation of surplus labor or surplus value without making reference to the differential ownership of the means of production.” (Roemer 1996, 61-62); “Exploitation can occur without the buying and selling of labor power; and conversely, such buying and selling can occur, resulting in an unequal labor exchange, without exploitation.” (Roemer 1996, 103).

⁴⁵ “If rights were distributed so that Andrea and Bob each owned one-half of (the stock in) each machine, there would be no exploitation, regardless of their respective preferences for leisure and consumption (that is, regardless of who hires whom)” (Roemer 1996, 101).

⁴⁶ “It was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called distribution and put the principal stress on it. Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. (...) Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democrats) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution.” (Marx 2009 (1871), 10-12)

be considered as (negatively) close to this idea. In his view, unfairness does not lie in the labor relation itself, but in the unfair distribution of initial endowments (once again: in the “before” of work).

Nonetheless, note that there is a relevant difference here. In this case, unlike Rawls’ POD, it is a matter of the means of production. It is because of their “less-than-equal ownership of the means of production” (Roemer 1996, 102) that one is exploited. As we have seen earlier, in Rawls, the issue of the ownership of the means of production is not addressed; the capital of POD is “economic and human capital” in the shape of money and public education, not the means of production (that is, shares of enterprises). In Rawls’ framework, the issue of ownership of the means of production is to be decided at the level of historical contingencies; as such, it is not said to raise concerns of justice (Rawls 2001). By contrast, in this issue Roemer does find concerns about justice, and indeed later amended his property-relations definition of exploitation so as to include labor, in response to criticisms that his prior definition “fails to capture the relation of dominance or dependence between exploiter and exploited, and that it does not mention labor” (Roemer 1996, 104), with which it is hard to disagree. However, even still, better accounts of exploitation can be found in the literature.

1.6.1. *Exploitation Beyond Class*

To resume, there are two elements that Roemer’s conception of exploitation does not seem to take into account:

- the normative specificity of labor relations, as essentially exceeding property even though deeply related to it; and
- exploitative relations rooted in status inequalities (rather than inequalities due to endowments).

These shortcomings are of crucial significance for our concerns. First, they entail that, in Roemer’s account, the notion of exploitation is deprived of any critical-normative potential with respect to work, because it focuses exclusively on issues of property. This means that, according to Roemer, redressing ownership inequality is the only required task of justice to eliminate exploitation. But this is still not the case. Consider, for instance, what I have referred to as the “somebody’s got to do it problem” (SGP) – the problem of who shoulders the burden of performing the socially necessary tasks needed for the reproduction of society. Who is going to perform them, in a market socialist world? In our world, for instance, low-paid, socially necessary tasks tend to be reserved for the least socially advantaged. In one sense, society may be said to free-ride on them, because they exempt others from performing such tasks. Re-allocating property stocks does not resolve this problem. Additionally, those who conceive and those who execute at work would still be in a situation of contributive inequality, where the former take all the contributive benefits at the expense of the latter. Work is necessary in order to meet inescapable mutual social needs – which are not likely to disappear even in a highly automated world, despite some of the apocalyptic predictions of the last few years (Frey and Osborne 2017; Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014) – and thus it is not an irrelevant to justice to think about *what people do*, besides just what people *have*. And the idea that behind contributive inequalities there are exploitative relations as well as cases of ‘opportunity hoarding’ is supported by the literature (see Tilly 1998 for instance).

Second, it is limiting to restrict exploitation to endowments. Indeed, social class – narrowly understood in terms of endowments – cannot be seen as the only domain of exploitation. Studies have shown that people’s social status, too, powerfully shapes how vulnerable they are to exploitative labor relations in a distinctive way (Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Status, broadly conceived of as the norms that regulate social expectations related to one’s position in social hierarchies (see Dahrendorf 1972), plays a role in determining one’s position in the labor market and, in turn, is reproduced by work structures themselves (see Chapter IV). For instance, being a non-citizen or a person of color cannot be said to be completely separated from the conditions of access to occupations that one enjoys, and their employment in them. The still persisting gender pay gap is just one, no less important, example of this, alongside phenomena like status-biased hiring and status-based occupational segregation (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; 2012; 2014). Sociological research as well as contemporary political theory discussions confirm that *class can no longer be said to be the unique sphere of exploitative relations*⁴⁷. The problem is that this way one overlooks the very *exploitative nature* of status-biased labor relations.

This point has been brilliantly developed by Philippe Van Parijs, using the conceptual tools offered by Roemer himself, and with his typology of exploitative relations within different modes of production (Van Parijs 1987). In this typology, Roemer describes “status exploitation” as distinctive of the socialist mode of production, whereas in the capitalist mode of production it is “class exploitation” that prevails (Roemer 1982). In this way, Roemer ends up representing class and status exploitation as necessarily tied to particular modes of production. However, having the (legal and social) status of being a non-citizen, as well as the (social) status of a woman or a migrant, powerfully affects one’s position in the contributive hierarchy, and significantly determines how one is expected or allowed to contribute. Recent developments in the political-theoretical debate on the subject have arrived at conclusions like these, mostly thanks to feminist theorization and the renewed attention given to the phenomenon of racial exploitation (Du Bois 2017). The feminist perspective is particularly useful in highlighting the fundamental role of housework and care for the reproduction of society, which is generally unacknowledged as “work” and cast as belonging to the sphere of nature and love. Any account of exploitation exclusively centered on property (or exclusively on the workplace) fails to grasp the contributive advantage given by unrecognized work to society and to individuals. Indeed, as Nancy Folbre puts it, “the most obvious shortcomings of Roemer’s approach reflect the legacy of the Marxian orthodoxy he otherwise rejects” (Folbre 1994, 595). The shortcomings of market socialism concentrate the failures of “two otherwise disparate traditions – Marxism and liberalism – which share a legacy of economism and androcentrism” (Folbre 1994, 605). In order to overcome economism and androcentrism, it is necessary to go beyond class. For this purpose, Van Parijs’ suggestion seems powerful, in that it highlights the role of *status* without renouncing the notion of exploitation, putting it at the core of the intersection between labor injustice and status inequality. This idea of status allows us to see the complex ways in which people are prevented from participating in social

⁴⁷ Other Marxists like Erik Olin Wright – whose views are strongly influenced by John Roemer’s theory – have proposed a distinction between “exploitation” and “oppression” precisely on this ground (Wright 2005). Unlike Roemer’s view, Wright’s conception requires the appropriation of labor effort from one group to another as a necessary condition for exploitation. Otherwise, in his view, if appropriation of labor effort is lacking, there is just “economic oppression”, which is conceptually different to exploitation. Wright refers to “multiple oppressions” (Wright 1999) when it comes to status inequalities, thus following Roemer’s class-centered approach.

cooperation as peers, exceeding class inequalities and intersecting with status. The core idea of all this can be put this way: *it is not only property endowments, but also social relations that matter for labor justice.*

Nonetheless, note that even reconceptualized so as to abandon Marx's approach, Roemer does not think that exploitation is a concept which is central or significant as traditionally believed. Indeed, after the publication of his works on the topic (Roemer 1982; 1985), he draws the conclusion that what matters the most is not the theoretical struggle over the best conception of exploitation, but rather reflections on social justice.

1.7. Roemer's "Three Equalities": An Unaccomplished Multidimensionality?

Recall that at the beginning of his *A Future for Socialism*, Roemer says that socialists want equality of opportunity for: (1) self-realization and welfare; (2) political influence; and (3) status. The discussion so far has shown that although he advocates a tripartite notion of equality, he only commits himself to equalization of material resources; there is no proper development of the ideas of political influence and status. Yet this should not prevent us from asking about where in this framework political influence and status are to have a place. Note that this question does not lead us far from our purposes: on the contrary, it fits our inquiry because, as I explained in the §Introduction, there are reasons to embrace a multidimensional perspective on labor justice, and since Roemer is a distributive thinker, it is especially relevant that a distributive theorist like him does not to confine himself to material goods (the economic dimension). In the light of the normative differentiation principle (§ Introduction), this would mean that Roemer may be committed to some form of normative multidimensionality, including concerns of social differentiation in his theory. Is this really the case?

First, it may be asked why Roemer points to *these* forms of equality and not to others. How does he justify this choice? Indeed, he merely asserts that this is what he believes socialists want. Thus, the commitment to differentiation, which may sound interesting as part of a distributive perspective like Roemer's, appears to be underdetermined. Nonetheless, Roemer does refer to the problem of the "combination" of these three equalities. He says that the problem of the order in which the equalities are to be pursued, or whether by pursuing one kind of equality others would follow, is difficult to address, and thus he leaves it without response (Roemer 1994, 14). Second, one may ask whether his theory is authentically multidimensional. After all, when he comes to define what equality of opportunity is actually about, Roemer talks only about "resources", especially with reference to health and education. Thus, there seems to not be much room for political influence and social status; and if there is, it is there indirectly, in terms of goods owned and skills possessed rather than social relations, organizational forms, or decision-making norms (see also Folbre 1994; Satz 1996). However, material inequality is essentially different from status inequality and cannot be reduced to it, even if, of course, they are deeply intertwined (see for example Ridgeway 2014; Fraser 2003; Satz 1996). When regarded from the perspective of status inequality, his perspective shows some shortcomings. A stronger 'status perspective' would have allowed him to see that wage differentials do not merely mirror one's skills, but are affected by one's status (see Chapter IV); moreover, his "managerial socialism" would have looked problematic as reproducer of status hierarchies, sustaining "a culture in which powerful and powerless regard each other with growing fear and contempt" (Satz 1996, 78; see also Anderson 2017). Therefore, despite

explicit premises, multidimensionality is not developed, bringing us back to the one-dimensionality typical of the distributive logic. This restricts the scope of Roemer's socialism. As Debra Satz effectively stresses, redressing status inequalities "requires more than simply giving people more money (...). Their relationships must be reshaped to provide them with opportunities for recognition, reciprocal influence and dignity" (Satz 1996, 73).

Indeed, status exceeds the distributive logic; it follows, so to speak, its own laws (Ridgeway 2014). Inequalities and injustices are also matters of relations and norms (Young 1990). Thus, labor justice cannot be status-blind (I will develop this point in Chapter IV). Analogous considerations can be made with respect to political influence. Even though Roemer points to equality in political influence as one of the key three equalities that socialists want, his fundamental acceptance of managerial hierarchy in the workplace and the rejection of democratic changes of economic units is at odds with his assertion of its importance. On the whole, the understanding of work as concerning the sphere of self-realization, excluding from its scope concerns of status and political influence, makes it hard to identify key normative problems at work, such as status inequalities and powerlessness. More broadly, this essential lack of multidimensionality, both in general and with respect to work, restricts the scope of socialism, narrowing it to a readjustment of material assets that, without changing norms of status and decision-making, cannot lead to the transformation of society that it is desired.

Finally, since the highest level of equality of opportunity demanded by Roemer's view is said to concern also status and political influence, note that Roemer says that is "impossible to maximize three objectives at once". In his view, one cannot have both status and self-realization, nor can one have self-realization and political influence together. Thus he concludes: "the kind of social organization that maximizes the equal level of opportunity for self-realization may well induce highly unequal levels of political influence" (Roemer 1994, 13). This way, Roemer represents his three equalities as part of a sort of zero-sum game – i.e. the more self-realization, the less political influence and/or status. One cannot have everything, and some priority has to be given to some goods over others.

I argue that this kind of "zero-sum conception" of multidimensionality is questionable. Such a view underlies an *ordinal view of justice*: it supposes an order of priority among alternative, competing goods. This clearly emerges in the following passage:

Imagine that we can rate each possible organization of society with a triple of numbers (a,b,c) where a is the degree of equality of opportunity for self-realization and welfare, b is the degree of equality of opportunity for political influence, and c is the degree of equality of opportunity for social status with that organization. What socialists disagree about is the preference ordering over all the possible combinations: is an organization yielding levels (2,1,3) better than one yielding (1,2,3)? (Roemer 1994, 13)

Given that socialists disagree on how these equalities should be 'combined', Roemer prefers not to take a position here, leaving the issue undecided. I argue that an ordinal view of justice should be replaced by a *cumulative* or *joint* conception of justice. A perspective that takes different dimensions as jointly connected may fit the purpose of justice better than a mutually exclusive, ordinal view. The mutually exclusive perspective prevents us from seeing the inherent connections between different dimensions of justice. For instance, the economic-distributive condition cannot be thought of independently from the relational and the political dimensions. They are jointly implied and related (see Chapter V). I will call this the *principle of joint justice*. It holds that the dimensions of justice considered should not be seen as

implemented *despite* the others as in a zero-sum game, but rather that the fulfillment of each dimension can be fostered *only* in conjunction with the others. Instead of conceiving of these dimensions as if they are contained in hermetically sealed compartments, with clearly identifiable boundaries, they are to be considered as inherently intertwined with one another. Strategies of mutual enhancement could be pursued: instead of an *aut aut* view, a *vel vel* one should be pursued. I will enter into the details of this in Chapter V.

On the whole, it can be concluded that Roemer's multidimensionality is unfulfilled. First, it is merely stated and not developed. Second, it is pursued through what essentially remains a one-dimensional perspective – i.e. through exclusively distributive means – as it is further shown by Roemer's class-centered notion of exploitation as well as by his essentially resourcist perspective on equality of opportunity. Third, it is conceived of within what I have called an ordinal conception, which sees the dimensions of justice as mutually exclusive, rather than mutually enhancing. Roemer's one-dimensional view of justice prevents him from developing an account 'in line with the times', for as a heterodox socialist he could have helped advance the socialist discourse in light of an understanding of the complexity of society and its inherent internal differentiation (Luhmann 1977; Walzer 1983; Fraser 2003; Honneth 2017; Schiamank 2015). His socialism thus results in a narrow ideal (Folbre 1994), in contrast to contemporary socialist reflections outside of the distributive paradigm which are increasingly aware of the need for a multidimensional perspective (Honneth 2017).

1.8. Conclusion

In the earlier paragraphs, I highlighted the implications of Roemer's distributive perspective with respect to labor justice. Let us recapitulate the steps taken.

1) I have addressed the norm of equality of opportunity, suggesting two orders of criticism. (i) First, the idea that justice should be considered as a matter of boundaries between choices and circumstances is neither feasible nor desirable, for: it is paternalistic and intrudes into individuals' behaviors and personal choices; it fosters the stressful "culture of performance" which may reasonably be expected to harm people's welfare; it advances a view of justice that holds a "suspicion" for people's behaviors rather than points to social structures that reproduce injustices; it is incompatible with an idea of social equality in that it implicitly stigmatizes and blames those who do not achieve valued outcomes; and, it relies on the myth of a naturalized match between skills and wages in the labor market. (ii) Second, the "levelling the playing ground" conception of justice naturalizes competition, which it takes as unproblematic given the background, even if it raises major difficulties to the very concepts of equality and self-realization, in that it necessarily entails selective self-realization. This leads to the *external justice* thesis.

2) After presenting some distinctive features of his conception of market socialism, I have compared Roemer's market socialism with Rawls' property-owning democracy. I have shown that, if regarded from the perspective of the economic-distributive conditions of labor justice, Roemer's view is more demanding than Rawls' in that it is not content with capital dispersal, but requires profit sharing and a redistribution of the means of production, without sacrificing competition, free market, and efficiency. He thus brings profits into the sphere of justice, which is usually kept outside of normative considerations by distributive theorists. However, just like Rawls, and unlike other market socialists, he does not question the hierarchical

organization of the company, thus advocating a kind of *managerial socialism*. This position takes for granted the idea that worker-managed companies are less efficient than hierarchical ones, despite empirical evidence to the contrary and a general lack of evidence that hierarchy increases product. Managerial socialism also does not allow us to extend socialist concerns to status inequalities and political influence. From this, I have drawn the conclusion that the principle of equal freedom from need that I argued for in Chapter I when addressing the POD economic capital thesis may be complemented with what may be called *a principle of equal access to socially produced wealth*, even though concerns for wage justice should equally have been considered. The difference between these principles lies in the fact that equal freedom from need is a distributive requirement for real free occupational choice, which takes place “before” entering labor, whereas the principle of equal access to socially produced wealth is interested in the “meantime” and the “after” of labor, and takes into account the value socially produced through work. In Roemer’s view, the need for profit-sharing is due to requirements of equality connected to socialist concerns, but a justification for this is not really developed, and the lack of democratic tools to redefine wage justice may be a weakness.

3) I have questioned Roemer’s conception of exploitation, showing that its class-centered perspective prevents him from grasping the exploitative relations that go beyond financial endowments. The distributive interpretation of exploitation impedes him from addressing unfair labor relations as normatively pertinent issues, implicitly conveying the view that, once redistribution of endowments is provided, then the demands of justice have been met. First, the focus of Roemer’s socialist thought is no longer on work relations but rather on property. There is, thus, a sort of “distributive turn” in socialist thought, at least as represented by luck egalitarians. This shift mirrors the pivotal role that the distributive paradigm has played in the last number of decades, shaping vocabularies of justice and narrowing the whole political-philosophical agenda on the problem of allocating goods. This way work ends up being deprived of critical-normative tools which are entirely expected to follow from readjustments of property relations. This has a precise consequence: we are not provided with resources for addressing labor justice even from the socialist tradition. The elements we expected to find, which we had also not found in the liberal-egalitarian model, seem not to be there⁴⁸. In such a framework, there seems to be a real neglect of work. If issues of justice and exploitation are just matters of property distribution, then once again, the spectre of the *derivative* thesis can be discerned. Second, even after Roemer reconceptualizes it, the notion of exploitation is only partially useful. To be sure, there is little doubt that the idea of exploitation needs to be reconceptualized, and it is an open question whether or not it is still a useful concept for addressing issues of labor justice (see Vrousalis 2018). However, a key problem of the Marxist conception of exploitation, is that it seems to be *unable to recognize the forms of exploitation that exceed social class* but involve people’s status and social relations, as the idea of “status exploitation” relaunched by Philippe Van Parijs powerfully shows. Roemer’s egalitarianism seems thus to share these shortcomings with the broader Marxist tradition (Folbre 1994), which is also exclusively centered on property. No surprise, then, that his only references to work are those which refer to jobs in the “official economy”, overlooking unpaid labor. In response to these shortcomings, I have argued for a joint conception of multidimensionality,

⁴⁸ Of course, this observation does not mean that it is inherently wrong to rethink the concept of exploitation in a distributive way.

where one dimension should be seen as supported and implied by the other dimensions, which I will develop in Chapter V.

To recapitulate, the concepts that Roemer provides for us to rethink labor justice are the following:

- free occupational choice;
- equal opportunities in skills training; and
- equal access to socially produced wealth.

Except for the last point, Roemer's view is not much different from the liberal account. Indeed, in one sense the liberal view seems richer and even more radical than Roemer's. After all, Rawls acknowledged that some reorganization of the workplace would be necessary, even if he did not develop this point (Rawls 2001). Despite self-labelling as socialist, Roemer's conception seems thus to be less satisfying than Rawls' when it comes to labor justice. In his account, we find an economistic, class-centered, paternalistic view that tends to blindly trust competition, exaggerates the virtues of the market and is essentially content with educational intervention, without ever questioning work and its structures. In so doing, Roemer naturalizes the current structures of work and implicitly endorses the mainstream thesis that work, after all, lies outside of the scope of justice.

The discussion has shown that the socialist and liberal views fundamentally converge when it comes to labor justice. If they disagree on this or that point of distributive choices, they substantially converge where they leave the structures of work fundamentally intact. Whereas Rawls has some philosophical awareness of the normative relevance of work, even though he does not commit himself to labor justice, Roemer's conception, despite its asserted commitment to self-realization, paradigmatically shows the insufficiency of the *derivative* thesis. Nonetheless, his account of how profits are to be redistributed demands more than Rawls' property-owning democracy, and provides useful tools for widening the economic-distributive conception of labor justice to account for considerations on the outcomes of one's contributions, and ideas about access to socially produced wealth. Yet, it is clear that, even modifying property-relations, structures of work are not themselves challenged. Unfair labor relations can co-exist in a socialist market framework. The principle of joint multidimensionality is intended to overcome distributive one-dimensionality. As a contemporary socialist, Roemer seems to not have been receptive to increasing theoretical and political awareness of social differentiation (Honneth 2017).

2. Against the Right to Meaningful Work: Richard Arneson

Unlike John Roemer, Richard Arneson explicitly addresses the normative problem of work within the market socialist framework. In his article "Meaningful Work and Market Socialism" (1987), Arneson argues against a right to meaningful work on the ground of the principle of neutrality of values. According to him, there is no such thing as a right to meaningful work, for a worker may legitimately prefer a "meaningless" occupation if it provides her with more money for desired consumption. That is, it is far from evident, Arneson argues, that workers prefer meaningful work to other valuable goods; "people may opt for meaningless work in order to amass resources that permit enhanced meaningful play" (Arneson 1987, 526). What counts is thus "the amount of preference satisfaction and its distribution across persons" (Arneson 1987, 527), but given that these preferences vary widely across persons, the state cannot favor the preference for meaningful work over any others

without violating its duty of neutrality. Otherwise, it would unjustifiably favor the preferences of some particular groups over others, so that, for example, groups preferring “meaningful play” would be unfairly discriminated for their tastes⁴⁹.

It is with respect to this that the market of “market socialism” joins the game. As seen earlier (§1), a typical feature of market socialism is the attempt to keep together concerns for efficiency with concerns for equality; this co-existence is supposed to take advantage of the virtues of both, and this has implications for the right to meaningful work. If the state cannot do anything to promote meaningful work because of the principle of neutrality, *then* it is entirely a matter for the market. Arneson thus explicitly justifies a point that Roemer alludes to in terms of free labor market as the best mechanism for allocating work⁵⁰. Interestingly, they both assume the inherent virtues of the market, and tend to overlook the role that powers and cumulative advantages and disadvantages play in it. If the project of keeping together concerns for equality with concerns of efficiency can be pursued, this should require a critical awareness of the way the market works.

Note that, unlike Roemer, Arneson sympathizes with the democratization of the workplace: “the industrial democracy aspirations associated with the socialist tradition can be satisfied in a way that is fully compatible with a ‘bourgeois’ preference-respecting treatment of the meaningful work issue” (Arneson 1987, 535). Equality and pluralism of preferences can go together, and for this to be possible, meaningful work is not to be conceived of as a right. Given that the state has no reason to favor some preferences over others, according to Arneson what should be of normative concern for distributive justice is rather the total package of benefits and burdens *connected with work*, rather than *the good of meaningful work in itself*. There is a wide range of goods associated with work – which Arneson totals at 17 – and distributive justice is to be conceived of as having to do exclusively with them. This is another manifestation of the *derivative* and *external justice* theses.

Similar arguments have been proposed by Robert Nozick (1974, 246-50) and, more recently, by Will Kymlicka (2002). According to Kymlicka, defending a normative perspective on work requires a perfectionist account of human nature, which is incompatible with a pluralism of conceptions of the good (Kymlicka 2002). For example, he argues, the Marxist critique of alienation is grounded in a perfectionist understanding of humans as beings whose nature is such that it is realized through work. Rather, Kymlicka claims that one might legitimately prefer to carry out “alienated work” in order to devote oneself to leisure afterwards. Why should anyone “force” you to be self-realized in the way they want? What if you prefer sources of self-realization besides work, such as leisure? (Kymlicka 2002; Arneson 1987, p. 525). After all, a plumber may be passionate about plumbing and an architect may hate their work (Arneson 2009). Nothing of an “objective” sort can be said on this subject; it’s

⁴⁹ “If state enforcement of meaningful work and state subsidy promoting it are unfair policies because they discriminate in favor of people who happen to have a taste for this particular good, what does constitute a fair state policy in this regard? My answer to this question is the conventional one that under familiar idealized assumptions a suitably regulated market economy respects everyone’s various preferences and satisfies the liberal ideal of state neutrality. The proper goal of state policy is to help people get what they want. Insofar as distributive justice requires the state to redistribute entitlements in order to promote equality, the goal of such redistribution is to help the worse off get more of whatever they want. The market, or rather an idealized model of the market, is recommended by its efficiency: it is unfair to deny a person a good if the good can be provided to him costlessly, without loss to anyone else.”

⁵⁰ “As a short-term goal, market socialism may take form as any of a variety of economic arrangements in which most goods, including labor, are distributed through the price system” (Roemer 1994, 27); “The limited degree of equality that I think market socialism can achieve is due in the main to my skepticism concerning the existence of alternatives to a competitive labor market for allocating labor in an efficient manner” (Roemer 1994, 120).

all a matter of individual preferences. A theory of justice must be compatible with ethical pluralism and the legitimate co-existence of different understandings and conceptions of work, and the idea of meaningful work does not pass the test of pluralism.

2.1. *Meaningful Work between Self-Realization and Pluralism: A False Antithesis*

Some objections can be made against this widely shared view. First, it may be objected that Arneson's concern for neutrality as a reason to reject the right to meaningful work is at odds with his commitment to market socialism as well as with his defense of the labor-managed workplace. There is a conflict here because these accounts are presented as if they are immune to the requirement of neutrality which justifies the rejection of the right to meaningful work. But these are controversial and questionable issues too, which seem to be taken as true without facing a level of critical scrutiny comparable to that applied to the issue of meaningful work. Why should neutrality count only in the case of meaningful work, and not in the case of the self-management of the workplace and market socialism?⁵¹

Second, dealing with the problem of work in terms of a choice to be made between self-realization and pluralism as the basis of rejecting normative expectations on work, seems not to be the best way to address the issue. There may be a false antithesis between self-realization and pluralism which prevents the normative debate on work from opening to alternative developments. *Liberals and socialists agree that a commitment to meaningful work would threaten value pluralism.* From this, they draw the conclusion that work is not a matter of justice, but rather of private preferences. The underlying assumption is that there are not objectively identifiable traits for work being meaningful, which is instead a merely subjective matter. But why should our normative perspective focus exclusively on self-realization, neglecting work fairness? The trade-off between pluralism and perfectionism could be avoided by addressing the issue of work in terms of the *right* rather than the *good*.

Abandoning the perspective of self-realization as the exclusive normative viewpoint from which to address the issue also seems to be required by changes in contemporary structures of work and culture. From a historical perspective, work can no longer be considered as the main or exclusive source of self-realization. From a normative perspective, it is doubtful that the task of philosophers should be offer prescriptions about what self-realization is, or to say to people how should they feel about work. This is not necessary to the purpose of labor justice. Nonetheless, addressing the problem of work in this way has prevailed for decades in political theory. Advocates of market socialism are no exception. A fear of compromising on supposed pluralist values has prevented political theorists from addressing issues of justice at work and the division of labor in a satisfactory way.

2.2 *The "Whole Life" Argument*

Many authors have argued against this mainstream view (Roessler 2012; Yeoman 2014; 2015) which I have called the *personal preference* thesis. It has been argued that meaningful work is not merely a matter of subjective preferences because "meaningless work" would negatively affect other spheres of life, including leisure, and thus would have an impact beyond work

⁵¹ Richard Arneson himself has acknowledged this weakness in his recent article "Meaningful Work and Market Socialism Revisited" (2009).

itself. This argument is substantiated by empirical research demonstrating that the quality of one's work, and particularly the presence of some specific traits, such as self-direction, powerfully shapes one's whole personality (Kohn and Schooler 1978; 1982; Spenner 1988). This can be called the 'whole life' argument. It justifies a normative concern for meaningful work *as long as* it affects *other* spheres of life, the underlying assumption being that different spheres of life cannot be artificially separated from one another.

Clearly, if work shapes one's personality and affects spheres of life outside of work, this has consequences for the very possibility of enjoying leisure-time. This renders implausible Arneson's view that a right to meaningful work is to be rejected because of state neutrality, because the features of work extend 'beyond work', as it were; they have an effect on the whole life of the individual, and affect the possibility of enjoying other aspects of life such as "meaningful play". Therefore, one cannot say that meaningful work is a mere preference among others.

This argument holds true, but it can be complemented with some observations concerning gendered housework, and the normative specificity that leisure has in that context. A person's social class, status, voice and position in the division of labor affects not only the kind of jobs they are allowed to take on, but also the chances they have of being able to act out their preferences for leisure activities. This is particularly true for women. It is well-known that, because of the unequal division of housework, an important "leisure gap" divides men and women (Hochschild 1997). The "second shift", that is, the massive entry of women into the labor market in the last few decades, has not changed this traditional division of household burdens. While working an 'official job', as studies have shown, women continue to shoulder most family care burdens; it has been found that, unlike men, they work "an extra month per year" at home (Hochschild 1997). This unquestionably affects women's chances to express preferences over leisure, in a way that is not represented by Arneson's *personal preference* thesis⁵². Why should this unequal access to preferences over work and leisure not be a matter of justice? The point is that distributive justice does not require any modification of the division of labor. This is proven also by studies on wealthy women: even if they do not lack resources, they are still expected to perform most of the housework, or are expected to manage the family's responsibilities by themselves, for instance by outsourcing paid care (Hochschild 1997; 2012). In an ideal world, work and leisure *should* be matters of individual preference, but in our real world this is not at all the case; work/leisure *preferences* should be taken as issues of justice themselves, *not as a given* preceding justice concerns.

However, this response is incomplete. The problem with the above approach is that it implicitly subordinates the normative relevance of meaningful work to the relevance of other spheres of life. That is, it implies that work matters *in so far as* other spheres of life matter. If taken seriously, in principle it would accept a situation in which work is meaningless provided that this does not affect other spheres of life of the individual. Yet, there are reasons to hold that work should not be meaningless *even* if this would not entail consequences in other parts of one's life. While the whole life argument is compelling, it does not tell the whole story about the normative relevance of meaningful work.

2.3. *Shifting the Focus: From Preferences to Fair Participation*

⁵² Of course, women *do* express preferences on sharing housework: in surveys, a large number of women said that they would like to share it. But these preferences have little impact on reality and are often self-repressed in order to avoid conflicts at home (Hochschild 2012b).

Most theories on work, including theories of meaningful work and post-work views (see Chapter V), are centered on defending a normative perspective on work from the standpoint of its meaning for individuals. These views do not contest the very way the debate is set, i.e. as turning around the antithesis between *work as a personal preference* and *value pluralism*. Each perspective opts for one or the other side of the river, without questioning whether there could be alternative sides to take. What they do is to advocate the moral legitimacy of the preference for meaningful work, thus defending meaningful work from liberal attacks, but in so doing, they implicitly accept the terms of the debate as the liberal-distributive theorists have set them. *They, too, are not concerned with justice, but with the meaning of work.* This way, we still lack tools for addressing unjust work structures; *before self-realization, work fairness is not ensured.* As a result, this view shared by opposite participants of the debate endorses a fundamental assumption, namely that *the only way of claiming that there is a normative dimension to work is to address it as a means for self-realization and human flourishing.*

The problem with this assumption is that, first, it tends to represent work as a *solipsistic* activity rather than a *social relation*, which thus cannot be reduced to the atomistic category of preference, so that it has the same normative weight as personal tastes. Second, it is a false premise to begin by thinking that the only way to defend a normative dimension of work is from a perspective of self-realization, which tends to monopolize the debate and prevent alternative articulations of the problem. This false premise results in the widely shared assumption that work and the division of labor lie outside of the scope of justice, for they occupy a relatively irrelevant place in the moral geography of what matters for justice. At most, according to such views, justice has to do with goods connected with work; it should thus interfere neither with what people do nor with their preferences. Thus, what should be questioned is the appropriateness of the category of preference when addressing the normative problem of work, and the idea that we should be focused on the meaningfulness of work at the level of the individual. Let us address these points in turn.

For most people, neither work nor leisure has anything to do with preference. Rather, both are liable to a great deal of constraint. The distinctive trait of those who lack the means to survive is that they are *forced* to sell their labor-force – the only thing they own – to owners of capital in order to survive. Hence, people who don't have enough means to survive without work (as a result of insufficient family endowments or pre-existing material family advantages) are forced to get the jobs that the labor market offers, if available. The fundamental condition of unfreedom from need (or of unequal freedom from need), as I have argued earlier, prevents the liberal principle of free occupational choice from being properly realized. The distributive-economic condition of labor justice is intended to provide the material means necessary for real free occupational choice in an unconditional way. This economic-distributive strand of labor justice shows that regarding work as a matter of personal preference is not the starting point from which considerations of justice follow; rather, making work a matter of personal preference, possible only under a perfectly working model of labor justice, should be one of the eventual aims of justice. But this would follow *from* labor justice – it does not constitute the grounds for rejecting it.

The idea of preference and the assumption of the inherent fairness of the labor market do not take into account the condition of fundamental constraint under which most people work in order to survive. But avoiding external constraint in order to preserve freedom should be

of great concern for liberal thinkers. So-called “dirty work” – that is, badly paid, less rewarding, difficult, and often menial work – is certainly not likely to be “preferred”. ‘Choosing’ it is reserved for people with certain racial and class traits (Gomberg 2007). Can we legitimately say that they are allowed to express any ‘preference’ for leisure or work or that, to them, work is a matter of a private preference? As Beate Roessler has argued, assumptions like these are “highly idealized”, as they assume that “everybody enters the market with the same power to negotiate” (Roessler 2012, 79).

However, it may be objected that distributive theorists argue precisely that distributive justice should intervene on these constraints: after all, once resources are equalized according to the chosen distributive principles, then the task of justice would be accomplished and work would actually concern the sphere of personal preferences. But this is not the case. There would still be norms, social relationships, power asymmetries, and contributive inequalities that would prevent people from expressing their preferences on work. Equalizing resources provides a fundamental condition for labor justice – namely equal freedom from material need – but this is only half of the story: work would not be merely a matter of personal preference *even if* no one lacked material resources and there was genuine free occupational choice. Work and leisure *preference* is itself reserved for those who are better positioned within social hierarchies and the division of labor in relational, contributive, and political terms, besides just economic-distributive.

I wish to complement the “whole life” argument by drawing on the concept of work as a social relation. The concept of preference is, indeed, morally atomistic and methodologically individualistic. Individuals can express their choices without any necessary relation to others. Thus they are abstract atoms determining that they prefer this or that. When thought of in connection to work, this picture looks quite problematic. People do not merely express preferences for this or that job in order to get it. Rather than normatively reducing our conception of work to the category of preference, work should be understood as a form of participation in social cooperation in the first place.

First, note that some have more room to express preferences over the work they wish to perform than others. Call this *the problem of unequal access to preference*, or of *stratified preference*. The notion of “contributive inequality”, as I suggested in the Introduction, was meant to highlight precisely this: there are different levels of access to job prospects and quality, and this in turn considerably restricts and stratifies workers’ abilities to express preferences. The spectrum of choices over which preferences can be expressed is strikingly different for each person – and, most importantly, *this is not merely due to skills inequality*, as some authors assume. Not only does the spectrum of choice change from person to person according to their social class, status, geographical position, parents’ profession, and individual traits, but the availability itself of desirable jobs is determined by a number of concurrent mechanisms that operate outside of the control of the single individual: the market, the state, other institutions, owners of capital and investors, the educational system, geographical position, other workers’ positions, the economic framework in a specific moment, economic supply, changing social needs, and so on. The idea of “preference” should thus be contextualized within the complex network of capital, choice, actions and actors, which operates as a vast system of interdependence and constrains individuals.

Second, interdependence is also a major inherent feature of the social division of labor. By definition, the social division of labor consists of people performing tasks that complement the

tasks performed by others in order to meet mutual social needs. Trivially, one could not be a steel worker without someone else producing the food she needs to live and go to work, someone looking after her kids while working, a bus driver taking her to her workplace every day, operators working on the maintenance of the routes traversed, and, within the company, the other figures necessary for the steel to be ready to sell to other companies and customers. That is to say that *it is in the definition itself of the division of labor that each position in the social division of labor cannot be abstracted from the others*. Workers cannot be abstracted from the broader system of social cooperation upon which their roles, tasks, productivity, and positions on the ladder of labor depend. Work is a social relation at both the micro-level of the single economic unit (the company, the household, etc.) and the macro-level of organization of social tasks. This is a sociological fact: Adam Smith (1950 [1776]), Émile Durkheim (1967 [1893]) and others devoted their most relevant reflections to the division of labor shedding light on its inner complexity, its virtues as well as its problems.

The notion of interdependence that I am stressing here is still too vague, and should be specified further in terms of *horizontality* and *verticality*. Interdependence is not merely the fact that everyone's work and lives *depend*, one way or another, on the work of others. Interdependence also points to the fact that one could simply not do what they do without others allowing them *not* to perform certain other tasks. This has normative relevance especially in that the tasks that one can avoid performing are often not particularly desirable; dirty, hard, unrecognized and low prestige labor can be attributed to others. Interdependence in this case means that one can be freed from certain undesirable tasks, and devote oneself to other, more desirable ones. This happens at a variety of levels: within the economic unit of the company, in the division between task conceivers and task executors (Schwartz 1982; Murphy 1993; Young 1990; Gomberg 2007; Sayer 2009), as well as on a broader, global scale (think of the outsourcing of tasks to Global South). A classical example can be found in Aristotle, who found the division between masters and slaves to be natural and even desirable. In Aristotle's view, some were to devote their time to contemplation, and in order to do this, they should be free from manual labor, which is to be outsourced to others. The distinction between organizers and executors is thus far from being overcome:

Some organize and oversee our shops, bus barns, factories, offices, and schools; others carry out specific tasks within the organization of labor, some requiring specialized training, many requiring only mastery of simple skills. Like Aristotle, many view the occupants of these social positions as naturally suited to them. (Gomberg 2007)

In other words, the vertical interdependence of contributive inequality allows some to be free from some tasks at the expense of others. Even today, this division is generally seen as natural, almost in the way Aristotle did, even though ideologies of meritocracy tend to provide a rational justification. Indeed, the belief that such a division is natural is sustained by the false antithesis that I identified earlier, and which is endorsed by Richard Arneson – when work is put outside of the scope of justice, our current ways of socially organizing tasks are implicitly legitimized, as they are seen as resulting from workers' legitimate personal preferences.

The problem with contributive inequality and, more precisely, with vertical interdependence is that this puts one in a position of *contributive advantage*. As Elizabeth Anderson has effectively observed, it is not from the perspective of “the self-sufficient Robinson Crusoes” that principles of fair cooperation are to be decided:

The productivity of a worker in a specific role depends not only on her own efforts, but on other people performing their roles in the division of labor. Michael Jordan could not make so many baskets if no one kept the basketball court swept clean. (Anderson 1999, 321).

The normative core behind the fact of social interdependence lies in the consideration that individual achievements at work as well as contributive advantages are inherently related to those of others in the division of labor (see also Dietsch 2008). Once this interdependent perspective is embraced, the category of preference becomes immediately problematic, for one cannot address individual self-realization and preferences without calling into question other contributors' relative position in the division of labor as being equally relevant.

Therefore, rather than being a morally solipsistic matter of private preference, work should be seen as a form of participation in social cooperation, that is, as a *social relation* in the first place. Once acknowledged as a social relation, the trade-off between justice and preference pluralism which prevents a conceptualization of labor justice is no longer there. Once the entitlements to express preferences are seen within the broader context of the social division of labor and the conditions of access to the labor market, work stops being merely a matter of individual choice. Rather, it is understood as being part of a broader system of interdependences in which each factor operates affecting and being affected by what others do.

Addressing the problem from this standpoint – social relation instead of private preference; interdependence instead of moral solipsism; multidimensionality instead of one-dimensional distribution – provides a methodologically advantageous and normatively pertinent perspective. It forces one to see the interconnections – both vertical and horizontal – involved in the social organization of tasks, from which no one can be isolated. This social interdependence condition asks theories to see such interconnections as fully-fledged parts of their normative considerations on work. As a result, since Arneson's idea of preference does not meet the social interdependence condition, it should be rejected.

2.4. *Labor Good vs Labor Justice: Pragmatic Pluralism*

Arneson's objection is, however, to be taken seriously from another point of view. His objection is addressed against those who defend a normative view on work from a *perfectionist* perspective. Indeed, taking a look at contemporary normative approaches on work, it emerges that the main standpoint of reflection is to conceive of work as an ethical, perfectionist issue. Theories of "meaningful work" like those of Beate Roessler (2012), Ruth Yeoman (2014), and Andrea Veltman (2017) are explicitly perfectionist, each falling somewhere on a spectrum of different degrees of commitment to perfectionism, which runs from Roessler's "moderately perfectionist" liberal view, to Veltman's "eudaimonistic meaningful work", centered on virtue and "excellence" as in the Aristotelian tradition (see Chapter V). Paul Gomberg's perspective on contributive justice (2007), too, is grounded in strong perfectionist assumptions about human nature, such as in the idea that everyone must flourish as a human being and that *flourishing means precisely the development of skills by means of complex work*, and taking charge of others' flourishing as well (Gomberg 2007; see also Murphy 1993). I argue that these ways of defending the normative relevance of work are vulnerable to criticism, and lead to untenable conclusions which somewhat justify Arneson's concern for pluralism. Arneson and liberal thinkers are right when they express a dissatisfaction with such approaches, but they draw

from this *the wrong conclusion: that work is not a matter of justice whatsoever*. Can we legitimately tell them that they're naturally lacking of some fundamental human feature? Arneson and Kymlicka can hardly be contested on this point.

Note that perfectionism is not only a feature of meaningful work theories and of theories which advocate for work as an essential means for human flourishing. Post-work theorists like Kathi Weeks share perfectionist views. In rejecting any ethical centrality to work, and in advocating an "ethics of the refusal of work" (Weeks 2011), also post-work theorists approach the problem in terms of competing conceptions of the good. Although they situate themselves at the opposite side of the desirability spectrum, they are still reasoning within the same philosophical gesture.

Meaningful work theories and post-work views can be both defined as *desirability views*. They address work in terms of whether or not it is desirable. They thus represent the problem of work as being a matter of defining the terms of its desirability. If one considers this, it is hard to deny that Arneson's concern for pluralism has some shareable justification. Against the methodological stance of the desirability view, I wish to make some observations.

First, trivially, many people wouldn't express interests like the ones described as fundamental by these authors, and yet this wouldn't make them "less human" or less-than-anything. They would simply be legitimately uninterested in developing their skills or achieving excellence in any field. Or they would legitimately find sources of meaning in things, relationships, activities that do not consist neither in work nor in leisure. How could one say that lifestyles like these are wrong, or that they should live differently? This is the problem of pluralism in interpreting the meaning of work. *Political theorists should not prescribe to people what work should mean to them, or what should they think about work*. If one genuinely enjoys working, no one can tell them that they are victims of the workist ideology; and conversely, if one better prefers to devote their energies to leisure, no one can tell them that there is something wrong in them. *Rather than prescribing worldviews about the ultimate meaning of work, we should ensure that conditions of labor fairness are met*.

This normative result should be complemented with a historical perspective. Bearing in mind contemporary evolutions in the labor market, any substantive affirmation on the inherent meaning of work looks to be anachronistic. Labels such as the "post-industrial society" (Touraine 1971) and the increasing number of changes in the way that labor is allocated, such as its becoming progressively deregulated and precarious (Sennett 1999; Gallino 2011; Standing 2011; 2014), along with an increasing difficulty in drawing a clear boundary between where work starts and where leisure ends due to developments in technology (reflected by the new concept of "playbour" Kükclich 2005; Rosa 2010; 2013) make it difficult to defend the old-fashioned and romanticized ethical centrality of work for human dignity (see also Honneth 2010).

Second, they overestimate the ethical significance of work. Recent research (Hetschko et al. 2012) has shown that the link between unhappiness and unemployment is a consequence of the high normative value given to work in our societies. For cultural and ideological reasons, society deems work the main source of dignity and meaning, such that the loss of employment cannot lead but to stigmatization and social contempt, which is internalized in turn by the unemployed. That is why those who are unemployed at the age of retirement show much higher levels of happiness than those unemployed and of working age. There are thus reasons to think that what prevents unemployed persons from feeling well in themselves is

not so much the lack of a job, but rather the social contempt for the unemployed. Thus, the unhappiness of some of those who are unemployed does not necessarily reflect the supposed inherent worth of work (Hetschko et al. 2012).

Third, the implicit consequence of such assumptions is a coercive and paternalistic conception of work. If work is essential for realizing humans' worth, if work is an irreplaceable source of self-fulfilment and meaning, if work is what makes humans truly "human", then those who prefer not to work, not to speak of the unemployed and the disabled, are deemed inherently deficient and "less human" than others. This conclusion is unacceptable: not only because it is not compatible with value pluralism within contemporary societies, but also because it goes against the fundamental moral premise – accepted by all of the theorists discussed and hardly contestable – that all human beings are equally and inherently worthwhile.

Finally, it is not merely a problem of pluralism. It is that putting the problem of work this way prevents us from focusing on issues of justice, for it restricts our view to the meaning that people attribute to work and to subjective self-realization, which is something that we should not decide in advance for others. Of course, these are very important matters, and this is certainly not to argue that they do not matter. Rather, I argue that issues of *labor justice* are primary to issues of *labor goodness*: issues of justice should have some kind of normative priority over issues of excellence. The problem, thus, should shift *from good labor to just labor* – that is, *from competing conceptions of the good to fair work*. This shift allows us to avoid the *aut aut* suggested by Richard Arneson and others, embracing a perspective of justice under conditions of normative differentiation and multidimensionality. This shift allows us to address the problem of labor justice without necessarily choosing between competing ethical understandings of work. Note that I have qualified this pluralism as *pragmatic* because it is certainly not grounded in an illusion of neutrality. It simply asserts that it is not necessary, for the sake of labor justice, to take a position in the dispute between competing conceptions of work as self-realization or as inherent drudgery. On the whole, the reasons for which the desirability views miss the point can be labelled *essentialism* and *paternalism*. Neither work nor human nature has any pre-emptively defined inherent meaning, and because under conditions of pluralism and social equality no one should be stigmatized or coerced for not conforming to prescribed models of meaningful work or post-work.

Therefore, even if he draws the wrong conclusion from his premises, there are aspects in Arneson's reasoning that are worth drawing from. Liberalism has provided us with precious tools to make sure that our normative views are compatible with other people's conceptions of the good, which can be fruitfully turned to when addressing normative issue of work. These tools are anti-essentialist and anti-paternalist, leading us to what can be called the pragmatic pluralist condition of labor justice: *it is not our task to decide once and for all what meaning work should have for the individuals, rather, we should primarily ensure that structures of work be fair.*

2.5. Conclusion

To recapitulate, it has been argued that:

1. the normative problem of work cannot be adequately represented through the category of subjective preference (social interdependence);
2. an ethical perspective on the inherent meaning of work (which may defend or contest) as the basis of defending the normative interest of work should be rejected; and

3. self-realization is not the only way to defend a normative perspective on labor: from a problem of “good work”, the perspective should shift towards a problem of “just work” (pragmatic pluralism).

The perspective of labor justice reframes the problem by keeping together concerns of value pluralism and concerns of work fairness. Against desirability views, it has been argued that it is not necessary to define, once and for all, what work should mean for individuals. Against the personal preference thesis, it has been argued that pluralism is not a good reason to reject normative considerations on work. We should embrace a perspective of labor justice rather than one which emphasizes self-realization, preference, or the inherent meaning of work and human nature – not because self-realization is not important, nor because a superior neutrality is claimed, but because one must ensure that all can contribute to social cooperation as peers in the first place, and thus that structures of work and the division of labor be fair. Shifting the focus from the inherent meaning of work to work as a form of participation in social cooperation allows us to avoid the paternalist and essentialist implications of desirability views, while rejecting the false antithesis which holds that work has nothing to do with justice because of pluralism. Arneson’s article provides the ground for a broader argumentation aimed at reframing the terms of the debate beyond the false premise that we should choose between pluralism and self-realization at work, providing some tools to re-direct the normative debate on work towards the direction of labor justice.

On the whole, market socialists’ contributions to the conceptualization of labor justice is unsatisfying, even less so than the liberal-egalitarian model. Roemer’s and Arneson’s commitment to equality is restricted to material goods and resources; when they go beyond allocative issues, their egalitarian tools appear insufficiently powerful. And yet, as self-labelled socialists, they seem to miss the chance to develop all the potentialities of the idea of equality with respect to work. This way, they have contributed to the privatization and naturalization of issues of work in the debate on social justice. Nonetheless, they have provided us with some elements that can be adopted for a conception of labor justice:

1. a principle of equal access to socially produced wealth, to be intended as a strand of the distributive-economic condition of labor justice along with equal freedom from need; and
2. a pluralistic perspective that may be re-interpreted not as a reason to reject labor justice, but rather as leading beyond the false antithesis between self-realization and pluralism.

These elements can inform a plausible conception of labor justice, but are not yet sufficient, for they do not meet the multidimensionality (or normative differentiation) condition and take us back to the *derivative* thesis. The discussion here has clarified that a perspective of labor justice will avoid the paternalistic consequences and moral solipsism of desirability views, while still defending the need for justice at work, in contrast to luck egalitarianism. Labor justice will shift the focus from the problem of the meaning of work to that of fair cooperation.

3. Universal Basic Income and the Division of Labor

If Rawls’ property-owning democracy consists of a dispersal of human and economic capital “at the beginning of each period” and Roemer’s market socialism consists of the widespread allocation of socially produced wealth through a social dividend, so that every citizen is entitled to a profit share, universal basic income (UBI) is the unconditional cash allocation of

income determined at the relative subsistence level, regularly paid on an individual basis (Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017). UBI has been one of the most debated distributive measures of recent years. What is so important in this idea that it has increasingly come to the fore as a key issue in European political debates?

While the distributive models I have focused on so far are mostly normative-theoretical in character, UBI is a concrete, institutionally designed distributive policy. Nonetheless, at the same time UBI is more than that. Indeed, in deciding between UBI and other distributive patterns, key normative issues are at stake. The debate around UBI leads us to the core of some key political and philosophical problems, particularly concerning the tension between performance-based reward and unconditional access to material resources. Especially relevant questions include: should people be ensured of unconditional access to income, that is, independently from their commitment or otherwise to work? What principles would sustain such a view? What role could, or should, be played by work in a society that unconditionally provides income for all? And the normative question that interests us the most is: what implications does UBI have for labor justice?

Addressing UBI from the perspective of work is especially suited to identifying what key issues are at stake in the tension between distributive justice and contribution. These questions are particularly relevant in so far as UBI is expected to affect what has come to be called a post-industrial society (Touraine 1971), involving the rise of automation and the deregulation of labor, radically changing the way in which we have traditionally thought of the relationship between a person's commitment to work, access to material resources and reward for their effort.

Some percentage of unemployment is, one way or another, structurally present – and usually deemed “physiological” – in all countries. The division of labor is the more and more fragmented, and a wider number of occupations are precarized, as the “gig economy” label points to. In such a framework, the old-fashioned ideal of “full employment” seems no longer to be realistic. At the individual level, the evolutions described by Richard Sennett (1999) seem to be relevant to UBI: work is no longer a linear, progressive route, as it was in the post-war period in Western countries; it has rather become an intermittent experience where one gig follows another. This picture may function as a realistic argument for UBI: since (decent) work is not available for all, desirable jobs are scarce, and work is increasingly uncertain and temporary, then in order for all to access “real freedom” (Van Parijs 1995), according to its advocates, income security should be unconditionally ensured regardless of one's occupation.

Clearly, the *unconditionality* requirement marks a stark difference from traditional distributive patterns. There are various reasons against the means-test selectivity of welfare: economic, because the process of investigating people's entitlements to benefits is expensive (and that money could be better used elsewhere), and normative, for recipients can feel that their lives are put under public scrutiny, and can feel stigmatized as “needy” and as living at the expense of others' labor. By contrast, redistributing the social wealth produced regardless of a person's commitment to work is expected to prevent such problems: means-test stigmatizing scrutiny of the poor would be no more, and all would be distributively treated as equals. Thus it is often said that the novelty of UBI lies in the decoupling of work and income, that is, its *unconditionality*.

For these reasons, UBI is supposed to provide *real* freedom as opposed to merely *formal* freedom (Van Parijs 1995; Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017):

A basic income is not just a clever measure that may help alleviate urgent problems. It is a central pillar of a free society, in which the real freedom to flourish, through work and outside work, will be fairly distributed. It is an essential element of a radical alternative to both old socialism and neoliberalism, of a realistic utopia that offers far more than the defense of past achievements or resistance to the dictates of the global market. (Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017, 2-3)⁵³

Thus in Van Parijs’ account it is mostly *freedom* that appears as the moral norm justifying UBI, rather than equality. Changes would require, Van Parijs argues, a “normative standard”, i.e. a “standard of freedom – more precisely, of real freedom for all and not just for the rich” (Van Parijs and Vanderborght 2017, 4). Van Parijs’ main concern is thus essentially a liberal one. However, allocating an equal sum of money to all on a regular basis *does* have something to do with equality, in that it gives equal material support to all regardless of their particular situation. Thus, not only does UBI provide material resources to all, it also *treats* all as equals. It does not discriminate between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, for instance; it does not ask intrusive questions about a person’s private life, to the point that it does not even require a person to work. It avoids any element of paternalism. As I will discuss later, UBI may have important implications on the demands of *social equality*, that is, on the way people are treated (see Chapter IV). Thus, what underlies UBI can be said to be the notion of *allocative equality*. It fits Rawls’ description of “allocative justice”, for it does not take into account the productive side of social cooperation, but only asks how income is to be allocated to people.

3.1. *Differences between Property-Owning Democracy, Market Socialism and Universal Basic Income*

The normative specificity of UBI can be best appreciated when compared to the other distributive models considered thus far. Let us identify some key differences between them.

The nature of the *distribuenda*. In Rawls’ POD, the *distribuenda* include human and economic capital, whilst Roemer’s coupons consist of the profits produced that exceed wages and savings. Under Van Parijs’ UBI, what is distributed consists of cash money, the quantity of which is determined at a certain subsistence level. It is thus not “resources” in the broad sense, not human capital, not infrastructures and services, but rather cash money. The *distribuenda* of the theories can thus be summarized as follows: *human and economic capital* (Rawls); *profits and opportunities* (Roemer); and *cash money* (Van Parijs). Note that Rawls’ and Roemer’s views allow for a wide interpretation of the *distribuenda* beyond material resources, so as to include goods and services beyond cash money, such as education, health services, and so on. Whether UBI allows for combinations of regular provisions of cash money with traditional welfare supports – e.g. education – is an open question. By itself, however, it does not *necessarily* require that there are other kinds of public investment.

Distributive model	Institutional realization	Distribuenda
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⁵³ Presenting UBI as an alternative both to old socialism and neoliberalism is recurring in Van Parijs’ arguments, since the article written with Robert Van Der Veen, “A Capitalist Road to Communism” (1986), which essentially sees UBI as a capitalist way to redistribute resources in the way communism was supposed to do. What about the rich? The rich, Van Parijs argues, will be required to pay taxes and then receive equal amounts of income in such a way that it would not really be a public expense. What one gives away through taxes, one takes back through UBI.

Liberal-Egalitarian	Property-Owning Democracy	Human and economic capital
Socialist	Market Socialism	Equal shares of profits (coupons) and educational opportunities
Allocative	Universal Basic Income	Cash money

Conditionality. POD and market socialism’s unconditionality is less obvious and less clear than UBI’s. Even though POD looks as if it unconditionally provides capital for all, Rawls rejects UBI because it does not meet the requirements of reciprocity (Freeman 2007, 229). In Rawls’ view, all able-bodied persons should work as a basic condition of social cooperation and reciprocity. Providing full payments to those unwilling to work is thus not appropriate, in his view, for giving a social minimum regardless of one’s participation through work can cause a sense of dependency among the worst off, which undermines their self-respect (Freeman 2007, 229). Also, as seen earlier, reciprocity requires that all “do their part”, without taking advantage from others’ efforts: “we are not to gain from the cooperative efforts of others without doing our fair share” (Rawls 1979, 343).

As the Malibu surfer problem makes clear⁵⁴, the idea of unconditionality is mostly addressed by Rawls as raising problems of reciprocity (Rawls 2001) as well as exploitation from the “lazy” (or the “parasitic”) against those who work (White 1997; Van Donselaar 2009; Barry 2001). For reciprocity advocates, even though all are worthy of respect, by choosing not to work one cannot complain if she is not provided with welfare provisions. For the advocates of the exploitation objection, receiving money without contributing through work means free-riding on those who work. UBI supporters have responded to these criticisms by asking whether there is an equal right to idleness, because in our current UBI-free world it seems clear that not everyone can afford to be lazy as some are. In “Fairness to Idleness: Is There a Right Not to Work?”, Andrew Levine (1995) points out that the right to idleness is very unequally distributed, in that in our current societies it is enjoyed only by the wealthy. To be sure, there is a free rider problem, but this does not necessarily outweigh the good of equalizing the right not to work. Likewise, Karl Widerquist (1999) argues against the oldest principle of U.S. politics, that “(s)he who does not work will not eat”, by highlighting that in most societies “those who own a sufficient amount of land, natural resource rights, capital, and government bonds are exempt from the fear that they will not eat if they do not work, but those who do not possess such assets do face that fear” (Widerquist 1999, 386). There is, thus, a bias shaping the reciprocity and exploitation objections. Duties of reciprocity are very unequally distributed in current societies, because the wealthy are not required to prove that they “do their part” as the least advantaged are expected to if they benefit from unconditional income. Interestingly, when the issue of work is considered in the debate, it is mostly around the issue of fairness of *whether working or not*. Unfortunately, the debate on reciprocity has tended to monopolize the debate of unconditionality and work. I will thus not focus on this problem, not only because it is widely explored, but also because I believe that it leads us far

⁵⁴ In Freeman’s interpretation, Rawls’ thought “seems to be that those who choose not to work should have the monetary value of a normal work day (eight hours) subtracted from the social minimum that the least advantaged normally receive” (Freeman 2007, 229).

from what is really at stake in labor justice. Nonetheless, note that there are relevant reasons against the reciprocity and the exploitation objections to UBI.

As for Roemer's market socialism, he seems to be sympathetic to unconditionality (Roemer 1996, 292), but he does not dwell on the problem⁵⁵. Although all citizens are entitled to the social dividend as a matter of citizenship, his market socialism cannot be said to be fully committed to this. The unconditionality issue has relevant consequences for labor justice, for it decides whether, and under what terms, we can enjoy freedom from need which entails real free occupational choice.

I have discerned three distinct types of distributive goods: human and economic capital, profits, and cash money. What consequences do each of them entail? I addressed earlier the possible consequences of POD's human and economic capital distribution. To recall, they may help decouple the link between labor-dependent income and income for real free occupational choice. I have also highlighted that widely redistributing human capital alone, while certainly desirable, would not itself substantially change the rules of the game of work. And, I noted that Rawls' interpretation of reciprocity cannot account for full unconditionality. Thus, real free occupational choice may not be actually achieved. As for profit sharing, I highlighted earlier that it introduces a concern over fairness in access to socially produced wealth on a broad social scale. The principle of equal access to socially produced wealth may follow. But what about UBI? How is UBI supposed to affect the division of labor?

3.2. *The 'Ripple Effect' Conception of Labor Justice*

The allocative view underlying UBI is usually associated with two views concerning labor justice, which may be called the *exit argument* (i) and the *bargaining argument* (ii) (see for example Widerquist 2013; Birnbaum and De Wispelaere 2016)⁵⁶:

- 1) *Exit argument*: liberating workers from material need and economic insecurity, UBI is expected to provide workers with an "exit choice" from undesired occupations, giving them more room for occupational choice (including the choice of whether to work at all).
- 2) *Bargaining argument*: liberated from material need, workers would benefit from more bargaining power, indirectly forcing employers to raise the bar of the quality of work, besides through just pay.

Thus, under UBI, labor justice is expected to follow more or less 'spontaneously'. Providing people with a regular sum of money, UBI is expected to change the rules of the game of work 'from the outside', as it were. For some authors, UBI is even expected to bring about cooperative relations (Block 2013)⁵⁷. Yet, despite such assumptions, there is no immediate or

⁵⁵ "The social dividend will be a form of guaranteed income, or what some European writers have called a universal grant. I prefer not to call it a grant, since it is not a gift, which "grant" connotes; it is that part of the national income which is not distributed as wages or interest but which belongs to the people as owners of the means of production. Of course, a society such as the one I am describing might decide to distribute profits in some other way to people, such as in proportion to the value of labor they have expended, but I personally would oppose that proposal." (Roemer 1996, 292)

⁵⁶ Similar considerations reported in these paragraphs are presented in the article D. Celentano, "Automation, Labor Justice, and Equality" *Ethics and Social Welfare* (2018).

⁵⁷ "Under current conditions, the phasing in of a Guaranteed Income can be a key factor in generalizing the kinds of cooperative employment relations that are indispensable for the effective utilization of advanced technologies. Since employers in the U.S. have a clear preference for coercion over cooperation, there is a need for social policies that persuade employers of the futility of coercive strategies. A Guaranteed Income could begin to do that by shifting the balance of power in the labor market, so that employers would have little choice but to experiment with cooperative employment relations." (Block 2013, 308).

obvious connection between UBI and the way labor relations are internally organized. Indeed, even though one may argue for an alteration to the balance of power, one cannot predict that such an alteration would necessarily bring about one institutional framework rather than another. That is another way to say that what happens in the contributive dimension cannot be subsumed under, or merely inferred from, the distributive dimension.

The view that exclusively distributive measures should be taken as a means of rethinking the structures of work can be labeled the ‘ripple effect’ conception of labor justice. This is the idea that by intervening on income, improvements on work conditions and labor relations are expected to follow, even though there is no obvious or predictable connection between them. The ‘ripple effect conception’ leaves the burden of settling the terms of fair labor contribution to the contingent interplay between employers, employees and other, numerous contingent factors that may play a role in the unpredictable balance of forces. This way, theorists are unburdened from the task of figuring out what labor justice should look like, but the problem remains to be solved. In most debates around UBI, work is addressed as an “unintended consequence” rather than as a crucial issue: it is as if work was supposed to be fixed by itself. Here one can identify here the *derivative* and *external justice* theses taking a different shape.

Therefore, I argue that regardless of one’s particular position on the desirability of UBI, *a conception of labor justice cannot be simply subsumed under an allocative view*. One cannot simply assume that work and the division of labor will become fair only by altering the material conditions of workers, *even if* this may help toward that end. Unjustly unequal divisions of labor involve practices, norms, habits, and relationships that have to be addressed and negotiated for their own sake: income tells only one side of the story⁵⁸.

In order to give substance to this argument, in what follows I will propose a contributive justice test. I will discuss the consequences of UBI when faced with some paradigmatic patterns of unequal divisions of labor. The so-called “rise of automation” as well as the gendered division of labor may offer two distinct viewpoints from which to assess the potential impact of UBI on labor justice.

3.3. *A Contributive Justice Test: UBI and Two Cases of Unfair Division of Labor*

If most debates on UBI tend to focus either on issues of economic sustainability or on issues of reciprocity (as in the Malibu surfer debate), when it comes to labor justice it is the exit argument and the bargaining argument that are the most recurrent. In the paragraph that follows, I will subject UBI to a ‘Contributive Justice Test’. In order to assess how UBI may help realize labor justice, I will explore how it deals with two paradigmatic cases: automation of labor, and gendered housework.

3.3.1. *UBI and the Automation of Labor*

The prospect of a “great substitution” (Autor 2015) of human work by machines has, in recent years, returned to a place of significance in public debates, supported by studies that predict an extraordinary increase in technological innovation, and the impact this will have in the relatively near future. Fear as well as enthusiasm for a “jobless future” have both gained traction, raising a range of issues for political philosophers to address. Economists regularly intervene in the debate, addressing the issue mostly in terms of costs and productivity. But

⁵⁸ For other criticisms see Gorz 1992; Gourevitch and Stanczyk 2018.

automation of labor raises more than technical issues; it presents a normative problem of justice.

Both in philosophical and public discourse, UBI is presented as the most suitable response to automation, for simple and compelling reasons: given that, due to automation, workers are likely to lose their jobs and former access to wages, alternative sources of income should be guaranteed, irrespective of whether or not one is employed. In contrast to the means-tested selectivity of welfare provisions, UBI is expected to decouple the dependency of income from labor, and thereby provide a secure basis against fluctuations in the economy and the labor market. UBI is seen as a powerful way in which to redistribute the increased profits due to technological labor-saving devices. In France, for instance, the idea of “taxing the robots” proposed by Bill Gates, entered the 2017 electoral campaign as a strategy of financial support of UBI. In some cases, UBI is associated with the old dream of a post-work society, where work is abolished through technological development. The contemporary version of this idea is defended by “post-work” views, which often include an ethical premise or corollary of basic income claims. On this view, political demands should shift from work as the main source of self-realization and dignity, and the emphasis on work in human lives should be reduced: in Arthur C. Clarke’s words, a world of “full *unemployment*” should be demanded instead (see Chapter V). Within this framework, post-work advocates consider automation as a way to liberate people from the double oppression of economic insecurity and the overarching ideology of work. A “fully automated world”, where UBI ensures access to income independently of individuals’ commitments to work, should thus replace the old-fashioned “workist ethics”. Decentering the core of self-realization from work to leisure, an ideal representing emancipation *from* work, is the objective here.

UBI and the post-work ethics are both interested in individual autonomy, whereas the ideal of equality is mostly conceptualized as an issue of income. Thus, there is a considerable lack of resources with which to address labor inequalities related to technological change. I will argue that in order for automation to play a part in social progress, as it is often assumed that it will do, concerns of equality relating to work must be considered beyond an allocative perspective. Before addressing the philosophical question, it is important to recall some relevant facts that ought to be considered when addressing automation in normative terms.

Heteromation and Unequal Divisions of Labor. It is hard to provide an exhaustive assessment of the impact of technology on human work. “Technology” is far from an undifferentiated, homogeneous entity: rather, different technologies produce different outcomes in different contexts, which cannot be fully anticipated. The long-term effects of technological innovation on work is a controversial topic, about which no one seems to have had the last word. Furthermore, one cannot merely emphasize a single factor in order to grasp complex socio-economic changes. Far from denying this complexity, a normative discussion on automation which is sensitive to work inequalities should first of all consider some crucial, interrelated facts: (1) the social persistence of work; (2) the “winners” and “losers” of automation; (3) heteromation; and (4) the unequal divisions of labor involved. In what follows, I will outline each of them in turn and then proceed to the normative discussion.

1. *The social persistence of work.* Despite the mixed emotional reactions about what is often said to be a “jobless future”, there is evidence that such expectations are misleading (Arntz et al. 2016; Eichhorst et al. 2017). Unlike Frey and Osborne’s famous predictions, Arntz et al. argue against the overestimation of job automatability: indeed, “occupations labelled as high-

risk occupations often still contain a substantial share of tasks that are hard to automate” (2016, 4). The automation of certain tasks is one thing, and the automation of a job as a whole is another. They should not be confused. Thus, studies show that, instead of merely opposing a hypothetical “end of work” with an equally hypothetical world of “full employment”, we should rather understand the scenario as being ambiguous, mixed, and hardly reducible to simple dichotomies. Transformations and adjustments to workplaces are more likely to occur than their total dissolution.

2. *Automation: winners and losers.* The “routinization hypothesis” is the most accredited explanation of automation. According to this hypothesis, the tasks that can be reduced to replicable patterns are those most at risk of being replaced by technology, irrespective of their intellectual or manual nature. In this process, high-skilled workers can benefit from a comparative advantage to low-skilled (Autor, Levy, and Murnane 2003, 1309). In fact, even though routine tasks can be found both in high-skilled and low-skilled occupations, it is the high-skilled workers that are more likely to succeed, whereas the low-skilled are at risk of being “displaced into lower-paying service industry jobs” or into a state of “permanent unemployment” (Pew Research Center 2014, 4). In other words, the low-skilled are “likely to bear the brunt of the adjustment costs as the automatability of their jobs is higher compared to highly qualified workers” (Arntz et al. 2016, 4). U

3. *“Heteromation” rather than “the great substitution”.* Unlike the emotionally loaded “great substitution” hypothesis, it must be stressed that new social needs created by technological change are likely to require new work. Indeed, technological change both relies on and creates human labor. In addition, time is not really “liberated” by technology – on the contrary, it seems that the greater the level of technological development achieved by societies, the less time available to them (see for example Schwartz Cowan 1983; Rosa 2010; 2013).

Rather than merely replacing human work, technological change involves a logic of externalization of tasks from Artificial Intelligence (AI) to workers. A concrete example of this externalization logic can be found in the so-called data-processing “crowdwork” bought and sold through online marketplaces like Amazon Mechanical Turk™, MobileWorks™, CrowdFlower™ and others. What these platforms do is provide a way of meeting the supply and demand for tasks that cannot be performed by AI essentially for two reasons: because algorithms currently lack the culturally nuanced capacity necessary to interpret the data, or because outsourcing to humans rather than investing in the further development of technologies is cheaper. Thousands of “crowdworkers” around the world are outsourced unautomated micro tasks through these marketplaces, which take a percentage from the payments. It is thus no surprise that Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s CEO, has talked about “artificial artificial intelligence”; after all, it is human workers that train AI or integrate its work. This may happen for various tasks: choosing the right tag for an image, deleting inappropriate content on social media, transcribing text from audio, recognizing scanned text, and many other forms of “human computation”. These badly-paid “data janitors” (Irani 2015a) might work for a variety of employers in a day, and the sole contract that they have is no more than the users’ agreement for signing up to the website. Ursula Huws proposed the concept of “Cybertariat” to describe the situation of digital workers (Uws 2014).

Employers are even allowed to refuse the work already completed and thus to refuse to pay for it in case they are not satisfied (Kingsley et al. 2014). Clearly, crowdwork lies in a sort of norm-free zone where elementary social protections as well as minimum-wage laws do not

apply. Lilli Irani has observed that the relations between employers and “taskers” (Standing 2016) are entirely delegated to algorithms, as if it were a mere “computational problem” (Irani 2015b, 5). Such power asymmetry goes with the so-called “taskification” of labor (Grey 2016), consisting of a reduction of work to a sequence of “clicks” which recalls Adam Smith’s old example of a stultified worker in the pin manufacturing industry (1950 [1776]). Note that this externalization logic does not involve only data work. Social robots too, for example, tend to create heteromation, because they are “not as autonomous as we popularly represent them to be” (Ekbia, Nardi and Sabanovic 2015). Indeed, they must be activated, made to work, guided in the environment, and taught how particular tasks are to be performed (Argall et al. 2009). Such invisible human work is not just accidentally involved in the pathway of technological change; rather, it is the condition itself of its possibility (Irani 2015a). Far from being impersonally autonomous, the technology of “automation” involves human work behind the scenes, revealing the other side of the “end of work” narrative. Thus, in place of the simple idea of “automation”, it seems to be more accurate to talk about the “invisible division of labor between humans and Artificial Intelligence” (Ekbia and Nardi 2014).

4. *Unequal divisions of labor.* It is interesting to note that high-technology work environments often emphasize the horizontality, anti-hierarchical nature of their labor structures, and characterize their work as being “creative, challenging and innovative” (Irani 2015b, 16; Turner 2009). The work that does not match the ‘creative ideal’, is outsourced and sent “outside the walls of [the] office” (Irani 2015b, 16; Fish and Srinivasan 2011), while maintaining the façade of horizontality. A boundary thus divides the “creative workers” from the “mindless crowdworkers”. Thus, technological change produces different outcomes on different occupations and social groups (Eichhorst et al. 2017, 100-102). In the outsourcing logic that links AI to human work, the most socially vulnerable groups tend to be given the “crumbs” of technological progress – just witness the highly unequal geography of supply and demand of “taskers” between the Global North and South. Whereas the former is the main outsourcer of tasks, the latter is the main executor of them (Graham, Hjorth, and Lehdonvirta 2017). While in Western countries crowdsourced micro-labor is often a secondary job, in countries like Philippines, India, and Bangladesh, there are communities that make a living from crowdwork (Kingsley et al. 2014; Iperiotis 2010). Furthermore, note that technology-related inequalities are not gender neutral: almost 70% of ‘mechanical turkers’ are women (Iperiotis 2010). This should not surprise us, as a previously socially segregated labor market will not suddenly equalize with the advent of automation. If most job losses tend to affect roles in which the presence of women is higher – i.e. administrative work – men are more likely to benefit from the new jobs, since their presence is dominant in the areas that are more likely to benefit from technological change, such as engineering and computing. The difference is stark – there is ‘one new STEM job per four jobs for men, but only one new STEM job per 20 jobs lost for women’ (WEF 2016, 39-40)⁵⁹.

Self-realization for whom? Within this grey zone where work does not “end” but unequal divisions of labor still exist, what would be the response of UBI? Even if a reduction in working time were demanded, alongside a shift from work to leisure time as the core of self-realization, this would not allow us to avoid the crucial question: in a world increasingly

⁵⁹ Moreover, one’s country of origin and related cultural characteristics are not irrelevant. The case of the “agent-assisted automation technology”, where “the agents work as ears and hands of the system”, is particularly instructive (Madrigal 2013): services like “outsource without accent” involve a “gendering logic” – the receptionists are mostly women – as well as a logic of “national identity management” (Poster 2007).

affected by technology, would the least advantaged benefit from automation so as to be able to contribute to structures of social cooperation as peers? Universal Basic Income, along with the ideals of “full automation” and the ethics of the refusal of work (usually not intended literally, but rather as a political strategy) do not tell us how to ensure that the “crumbs” of automation are not reserved for the least advantaged in society. By focusing merely on the goal of eliminating work, the possibilities of transforming work and the division of labor as they actually are are unfortunately neglected. Once again, the net result is to naturalize current forms of the division of labor. In other words, rather than asking ourselves whether or not to work, we should worry about making currently existing labor structures and divisions fair; and automation should be made an ally to this aim.

Contributive inequality. Outsourcing less desired tasks has historically been the privilege of the few. Slavery was an odious solution to the “contributive problem”, in that it reserved the burden of undesired tasks for the least advantaged. In the modern world, the promise that technological progress will eventually allow a sort of universal outsourcing of human tasks to machines has become commonplace. According to the usual narrative, menial labor will eventually be performed by machines, the new “slaves” of humankind. But as noted earlier, the human links of the outsourcing chain are not merely *replaced* by technology. Automation has not kept its promise: in one way or another, the final links of the chain are still human.

This fundamental problem of equality at work cannot be solved by technology alone, as is often supposed. Taking the contributive hierarchy as a given does not help us in this, as most normative accounts do. Even though the examples of technological change given are not exhaustive, they should make us aware that technological change in itself cannot improve the lives of all without seriously calling into question the contributive framework in which innovation occurs. Indeed, technology seems to either accommodate or exacerbate already existing inequalities. Taken alone, automation cannot challenge the classed, gendered, racialized traits of the division of labor (Irani 2015a; Light 1999); nor, to be sure, did it create them. Therefore, the normative discussion should not start from a zero-sum game between work and technology, as it often does, because in the global outsourcing chain of automation, some still perform the most rewarding work (which is ‘challenging, innovative, creative’) in a condition of competitive advantage over machines and those on the lower rungs of the ladder, while others tend to be confined to the invisible, taskified jobs at the fringes of the outsourcing chain. I have called such divergent entitlements to work quality and prospects ‘contributive inequality’.

What escapes the gaze of UBI? In the previous section, I identified some recurrent assumptions held by UBI’s advocates on work as the “exit argument” and “bargaining argument”. I will now make use of the categories suggested by Iris Marion Young and Paul Gomberg in their writings on labor justice in order to highlight what escapes the gaze of UBI’s allocative view when it comes to labor. I will consider both authors’ views in more detail in Chapter V.

According to Young, injustices in the division of labor include exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness, which she refers to as the “faces of oppression”⁶⁰ (Young 1990, 48-65). Exploitation concerns a structural relation of unfair transfer of energies from one group to another, which few persons accumulate at the expense of others. Marginalization

⁶⁰ I will leave aside the fifth form of oppression suggested by Young, violence, and cultural imperialism, for in her account they do not appear as primarily rooted in the division of labor (Fraser 1995).

refers to the expulsion ‘from useful participation in social life’ (1990, 53). As for powerlessness, this broadly points to a ‘lack of authority, status, and a sense of self’ (1990, 57). These ‘faces of oppression’ are embedded in structures and entail material consequences, but they cannot be entirely reduced to them. Whereas Young’s perspective of labor justice mostly focuses on relationships and decision-making processes, Paul Gomberg points to the nature of the tasks involved and particularly the ways in which their social division affects people’s abilities to flourish. The crucial point of Gomberg’s view is that those at the lowest rungs of the ladder of labor usually belong to the least advantaged groups, as is the case for racialized people. These groups are given the most simple, routine tasks; they cannot flourish, and thus cannot gain social esteem. Gomberg’s important questions are: ‘Who toils for whom? Who decides how labor is organized and who works? Who does the more complex and engaging labor? Can those who execute labor plans also make them? Can routine and complex labor be shared?’ (Gomberg 2007, 15). Even if most of his attention is focused on racialized groups, Gomberg observes that “the racial division of labor highlights the injustice of a more general social division” – that between those who conceive and those who execute work (Gomberg 2007, 11-12; see also Schwartz 1982; Murphy 1993; Young 1990). Gomberg’s “contributive justice” requires that those in the less favored positions in the division of labor be allowed to exercise their complex abilities, which would be possible only if all the members of society actually share the routine tasks.

I explore these views in detail in Chapter V. For now, let us see how these categories may help us to discern what exceeds the scope of UBI in automation, beginning with an application of Young’s faces of oppression.

1) *Exploitation*. Companies free-ride on crowdworkers’ badly paid labor “behind the scenes” of technology. The idea of heteromation highlights the managerial advantage over such hidden human labor (Ekbj and Nardi 2014). Workers’ status also plays a key role in the exploitative relation, since women and racialized people from lower classes and from poorer countries are especially liable to the exploitative logic – witness the phenomenon of “price discrimination”, consisting of the payment of wages based on socio-demographic traits (Kingsley et al. 2014, 20). The exploitative form of oppression cannot be addressed within an allocative framework in a satisfying way. For UBI’s advocates, basic income is supposed to counterbalance the exploitative relationship by providing workers with the material means necessary to increase their bargaining power. However, it should be remembered that UBI is not an option in poorer societies (as also Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) acknowledge), where many heteromated workers live. Therefore, those at the lowest levels of the division of labor, who are the most in need of social justice, would be excluded from the scope of UBI. Ameliorating the labor conditions of the worst off would mean providing a response of justice to technological change that UBI does not offer as it stands⁶¹.

2) *Marginalization*. By expelling some low-skilled workers from the labor market, and by further polarizing the division of labor, some people end up with the “crumbs” of technological change. In this way, they are prevented from properly participating in social cooperation. For this reason, automation raises concerns of social marginalization. Basic income may alleviate severe deprivation resulting from unemployment and contributive disadvantage, but social

⁶¹ However, even if available, UBI would hardly alter the fundamental relations and practices that make exploitation possible. In Young’s terms, “the process of transfer will re-create an unequal distribution of benefits” within a circular logic (Young 1990, 53) which would not affect its relational source. The idea that allocative justice can solve the problem of exploitation relies on a view of inequality as an unrelated difference in amounts of wealth.

inclusion does not naturally result from material provisions, even though the lack of material resources no doubt exacerbates social exclusion.

3) *Powerlessness*. There is no necessary connection between the allocation of a sum and actual participation in decision-making processes. Powerlessness has to do with workers' voices having no weight in the decision-making processes that affect their work. Decision-making involves rules, procedures, and structures of control which do not automatically follow from UBI. UBI provides material resources which may permit a person to quit their job, and thus offers an "exit choice". Still, one can hardly deny that democratic participation involves more than just the freedom to say "no". Democracy is more than this. In its basic definition, democracy involves people being co-authors of the norms with which they must comply. Democracy cannot be confined to a person's entry into and exit from a job. Beyond the negative act of quitting, democracy requires positive participation in the construction of norms and practices that affect one's work (on the limitations of the "exit choice" perspective, see Anderson 2017).⁶² Young responds to these "faces of oppression" through the democratization of the division of labor, which is expected to challenge the division between task-conceivers and task-executors.

Unlike the allocative view, Gomberg's response does not treat the problem as an allocative issue. Rather, applying his view to our problem would require that workers in the top positions within their organizations share in the outsourced tasks reserved for the least advantaged, so that the latter can exercise their complex capacities through training and freely chosen activities. The unautomated world would come under the same rule. The time freed as a result of task rotation would allow the low-skilled and least advantaged to exercise their capacities through freely chosen training which would be otherwise unavailable. Of course, this would be very demanding on the better off, and perhaps utopian. However, the contributive principle of rotation highlights an underrepresented concern in the debate: how can we ensure that arrangements of the division of labor do not have excessive contributive (rather than economic) demands on those in the lowest positions?

The idea pointed to here is that all members of society should benefit from technological innovation in their contribution to social cooperation, and not just in their incomes. Therefore, possible future structures and arrangements of work should make technology an ally in the goal of making social cooperation fairer, and help to rethink the organization of work in a more inclusive way.

In the following paragraphs, I will provide some elements that may help us to answer the questions raised here. UBI may offer a solution in terms of redistribution of income, but not of profits – for this, Roemer's idea of social dividend may work better. Against the background of an increasingly technological world, it may alleviate deprivation and widen the variety of options open to people. The unconditionality of UBI may importantly alleviate some negative consequences of jobloss and should thus not be underestimated. However, it should be complemented with other normative tools; as I have shown, UBI fails to fully address the normative issues at stake in the unequal divisions of labor involved in technological change. The "ripple effect conception of justice" does not meet the normative differentiation condition.

⁶² I am stressing the "democratic" remedy to powerlessness, but in Young's account this form of oppression is more complex and involves a number of layers: other than self-government, it also refers to workers' status in the labor hierarchy. I will include the latter in the relational dimension of equality, which is distinct from the democratic one.

3.3.2. UBI and the Gendered Division of Labor

Let us consider now the impact of UBI on gender justice (see also Katada 2012; Robeyns 2000; 2001; 2008). In this section, I will confine myself to considering only the gendered division of labor in the household. Consider four distributive options as responses to gendered housework:

- 1) *wages for housework*;
- 2) *capitalist welfare state*;
- 3) *equality of opportunity*; and
- 4) *universal basic income*.

Let us address them as distributive “ideal-types”, in order to assess their possible impacts on the division of labor.

1) *Wages for houseworkers*.

A classic distributive response to the gendered division of labor is to give wages for housework (Federici 1975; Fortunati 1981). The proposal was first suggested by the Italian feminist Silvia Federici, giving rise to a social movement in the 70s. While today the proposal is no longer accepted by most feminist movements, the critical efforts as part of the proposal have left us with useful critical resources, acknowledged as such by many contemporary scholars today (see Weeks 2011). This line of thought, in fact, has contributed to the birth of “social reproduction theory”, which seeks to conceptualize the sphere of life traditionally conceived as lying outside of the official economy, consisting of care and housework, as producing value itself, even though within the ‘unofficial economy’ of the household (Federici 1975; Bhattacharya 2017)⁶³. Despite the critical relevance of the proposal in that historical period, which usefully contributed to raising awareness of the problem in the public arena, it would not by itself stop the contributive subordination of women, being a merely distributive remedy to the gendered division of housework. Rather, it would perpetuate their contributive segregation because it would continue to cast housework as a ‘woman’s problem’, without making changes to the gendered division of labor – which would likely be made worse.

2) *Welfare state*.

As effectively highlighted by Nancy Fraser (2016), with the advent of the “second shift” of women and two-earner households, the conflict between work in the official economy and reproductive labor has been exacerbated. Lack of investment in public and support services have combined with the massive recruitment of women into the labor force to externalize carework to nannies and caregivers. The resulting situation is “a new, dualized organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide carework in return for (low) wages for those in the first” (Fraser 2016a). If they want to maintain the double-earners model, without confining women to the household or asking them to work part-time, families are thus forced to outsource housework to other women, thereby displacing the problem on a global scale within the so-called “global chains of care” (Hochschild 2000; see also Yeates 2004; 2005; 2009; Casalini 2012). Shalle Colen (1986) has called this phenomenon “stratified reproduction”. On the whole, the welfare state model tends to rely upon the provision of informal carework, without guaranteeing equal access to private caregiving, while at the same time disinvesting

⁶³ These theories are grounded in a reconceptualization of Marx’s notion of “exploitation” that could include spheres outside of the industrial unit, by analogy with the expropriation of resources under colonialism. See for example Fraser 2016b.

from public provisions. It does not help make the gendered division of labor fairer, but rather indirectly exacerbates it.

3) *Equality of opportunity.*

What would the principle of “equal opportunity” mean for women with kids who take most responsibility for carework? In Rawls’ account, “fair equality of opportunity” is mostly aimed at preventing social class from being an impediment. It relies on the distribution of money and human capital (education). But money and education would not, by themselves, lighten women’s burdens or necessarily result in a situation where carework is more fairly shared. The gendered division of labor does not concern only people in poverty, for by its nature it fundamentally exceeds the economic dimension. At most, wealthy families can afford to outsource carework to other women, who are often migrants coming from the Global South. The “care drain” solution would reproduce the “global chains of care” (Hochschild 2000) and “stratified reproduction” (Colen 1986) would merely displace the problem. In Roemer’s account, “equality of opportunity” means that all should receive a valuable education and have access to social dividends (i.e. equal shares of profits). In neither case would the labor burdens of women (which Arlie Hochschild has called “the extra month per year” that women devote to carework) be lightened or shared in a fairer way. There is no necessary connection between money redistribution, equal opportunities through education, and the way in which we share tasks. As for free occupational choice, once they have kids, women with care responsibilities cannot simply choose to “quit their job” as mothers. Thus they would be likely to have less choice than men in the labor market. Outside of the household, responsibilities for carework would significantly restrict their options. They would be more likely to take part-time jobs, for instance. This is, once again, unless they externalize carework, which clearly has costs, both affective and economic.

Free occupational choice means that no one should be forced into an occupation against their will. But casting the normative perspective on work no further than to the act of “free choice” and abstracting away from the constraints that are actually responsible for reducing the options of such choice, does not help to put us in a position of contributing to society as peers. Consider, for instance, that women taking most charge of carework *do* declare in interviews that they would like to get more help from their husbands (when applicable), but in most cases this rarely happens. Thus, even if they “freely choose” their work because no legal or formal constraint is at play, they nonetheless must choose between maintaining their relationships with their disengaged partners, or these responsibilities will be fairly shared at the cost of conflict or even divorce (see the illuminating work of Arlie Hochschild 2012b). The normative scope of freedom of choice is too narrow; it does not sufficiently affect by itself the contributive subordination of women.

4) *Universal basic income.*

As for UBI’s “exit choice”, one may ask: can women simply “exit” from carework? This appears to be almost a nonsensical idea. However, the unconditional character of UBI would widen their options by providing a form of material security that would encourage flexibility and wider choice. Indeed, UBI may also lessen women’s dependency on intermittent public help and on their partners (the “male breadwinner”); moreover, by unconditionally providing women with a secure source of income, it could *indirectly* facilitate some processes of emancipation from gender segregated labor in the market. Given the universal character of UBI, no doubt it is far preferable to the idea of wages for housework and to the welfare state,

insofar as it avoids fostering status segregation. But UBI does not by itself suffice to make the division of labor fairer. While intervening on class subordination, it doesn't address irreducible inequalities and heteronomies rooted in the division of labor. For childrearing and housework, there would still be the problem of who should perform them. According to some authors, UBI would have some effects on unpaid family work in that it would help to give it recognition (Walter 1989; Withorn 1990). However, it may well have the opposite result: that housework becomes even less visible and thus less recognized. By providing equal amounts of money to all, institutions may think of themselves as being "absolved" from the responsibility of providing concrete help through public investments. If there is no specific concern for women's carework and thus it is far from clear how the contributions of women would be recognized. Other authors believe that UBI would help women to achieve greater equality in the labor market by enhancing their bargaining power and making it more sustainable to work part-time, also leading men to share in domestic work (Standing 1992); other authors believe that UBI would have a highly positive impact on women's autonomy (Walter 1989). However, these are mere conjectures that, in the absence of empirical research, cannot be validated. What we can say is that nothing in UBI as such entails that men will share in domestic work (supposing the heterosexual family as a model for all families, which should not be assumed⁶⁴) – this seems to be quite an arbitrary presumption. Indeed, UBI may entail a quite opposite effect, leading institutions and collectivities to disengage from investing in public provisions for carework, and thereby exacerbating existing inequalities.

My claim is that injustice in labor cannot be met by distribution alone; it requires a response which rethinks our contributive patterns (see also Schouten 2016). In this case, for example, an egalitarian remedy would be to equally share housework with other members of the family and, more broadly, include institutions and the collective in the responsibility for socially necessary reproductive labor. Understood this way, gender would be a category characterized by multifaceted injustice: not merely class and status injustice, *but also more specifically contributive injustice*. Feminist contemporary reflections have addressed this kind of labor injustice by using terms like "social-reproductive injustice" or "family justice". In my view, this should be considered as a particular, status-based case of a larger form of injustice: contributive injustice, which reserves certain kinds of tasks and work for some people, while exempting others⁶⁵.

3.3.3. Conclusion

Both heteromation and the gendered division of labor are cases of contributive inequality. Of course, they are different problems, in that heteromation concerns the tasks that companies outsource to crowdworkers in order to fill in the gaps of technological work, whereas carework concerns the socially necessary tasks performed in the household that society tends to reserve for women. In both cases, the contributive pattern is an unequal one, since crowdworkers and women are not allowed to contribute to social cooperation as peers. In this framework, distributive justice – in the form of UBI – may certainly alleviate in some form the material constraints that exacerbate contributive issues, but it would not make, as such,

⁶⁴ Significantly, recent research has shown that same-sex couples with children tend to have similar problems of unequal division of labor in the household as heterosexual ones (see for example Cain Miller 2018).

⁶⁵ On the idea of exploitation of women based on gendered housework, see Delphy 1992; 2003.

the division of labor fairer. The limitations of the *derivative* and *external justice* theses are still there.

4. Michael Walzer: Complex Equality at Work

In the landscape of distributive theories, the position of Michael Walzer is unique. His work, *Spheres of Justice* (1983) is one of the few philosophical works in the distributive debate that takes the problem of work seriously, as a fully-fledged issue of justice. Consider his own definition of the scope of distributive justice: “*People conceive and create goods, which they then distribute among themselves*” (Walzer 1983, 6). Walzer thus integrates into his own definition the productive side of the story, which proceeds the distribution of goods. As seen earlier, distributive theories tend to overlook this logical priority of production over distribution, taking it for granted⁶⁶. Therefore, Walzer’s approach is relevant our concerns.

Walzer addresses the issue of work in the context of the broader problem of the fair distribution of social goods according to the norm of “complex equality”. This norm requires that goods are distributed according to the appropriate criteria of their “sphere”, whereas “simple equality” is the view that all should be entitled to the “same share” of something (e.g., money, political influence, etc.) as in a form of ‘arithmetic’ equality. What should be done, instead, is to ensure that social goods are distributed in such a way that they dominate only in their appropriate sphere (for instance, money should dominate in the economic sphere, not in the political sphere). The distributive criteria for a social good are determined by the good’s social meaning – for instance, in the case of health, the appropriate distributive criterion is that of need. When social goods dominate in inappropriate spheres, inequalities are objectionable. This strategy importantly acknowledges the fact of social differentiation⁶⁷ – that there are a plurality of spheres, each one following its own logic and requiring its own distributive criteria – according to which Walzer can accept some inequalities while still setting them within boundaries (they should not dominate other spheres). Note that in his view, such boundaries are not intended to be preemptively defined by political theorists, or by any external authority: rather, they are to be defined by social practices that attribute public meanings to social goods and their appropriate spheres (i.e. if money prevails in the economic sphere, society will condemn their intrusion into the realm of politics) even though this may raise difficult problems of conservatism that I will leave aside here⁶⁸. Walzer firmly advocates differentiated criteria for each sphere, according to the social meanings of the different goods. Nonetheless, note that he does not question the overarching *distributive logic* of the spheres: even if he brings the productive side of justice into distributive concerns (or, as I would prefer to say, the contributive side of justice), he does not doubt that justice is essentially a matter of distributing goods – and that contribution is essentially a sub-case of the wider distributive problem. The complex plurality of the spheres, thus, is to be traced back to the distributive

⁶⁶ “Here, the conception and creation precede and control the distribution. Goods don’t just appear in the hands of distributive agents who do with them as they like or give them out in accordance with some general principle. Rather, goods with their meanings – because of their meanings – are the crucial medium of social relations” (Walzer 1983, 6-7).

⁶⁷ “No full-fledged human society has ever avoided the multiplicity” (Walzer 1983, 5); “Distributive justice is not an integrated science, but an art of differentiation” (Walzer 1983, xv; see also Walzer 1984).

⁶⁸ Such concern for the social sources of meanings aligns Walzer to communitarian-like concerns for the cultural specificity of different societies and their values. To be sure, this methodological stance may be controversial, especially with respect to the conservative consequences of giving to currently existing social meanings and cultural values almost exclusive normative authority in defining the boundaries between appropriate spheres (see, for example, Okin 1989). But I will not develop this point further, for it would lead us too far from our concern.

logic. This preeminence of the distributive logic over the logic of the spheres is clear, for example, in his account of recognition and power as goods, presented in distributive terms (see Young 1990). Thus, as I will argue later, Walzer's multidimensionality and normative differentiation should have been furtherly developed as involving also a different logic to the distributive one.

A merit of Walzer's account is that he does not address "work" as if it was an internally homogeneous, undifferentiated object. Rather, work is presented by Walzer as cross-cutting a number of spheres, and as raising a series of different normative issues. Walzer's commitment to labor justice is thus nuanced and internally rich. Rather than focusing on a single issue, he touches upon a variety of themes linked to the problem of work and, more broadly, contributive inequality. For each problem, he aims at providing a response of complex equality, in contrast with 'simple equality' solutions. In his view, simple equality is at risk of fixing one tyranny by means of another. Connected to the sphere of the office, he discerns the problem of professions, the sphere of hard work, and the intermeshing between non-membership and exploitation. In Rawls' account, as well as in the socialist and allocative models analyzed thus far, these distinctions and internal differentiations are absent. He provides specific answers to each problem, assessing case-by-case whether there is an intrusion of one sphere into another, and thus attempting to re-establish the "right" boundaries between the spheres. What results is a lucid, complex, and sociologically informed picture of some key problems of labor justice.

Walzer's unsystematic consideration of the subject can be understood as involving two layers: *external labor justice* and *internal labor justice*. In the domain of external labor justice, he broadly considers problems of *access to occupations*: meritocracy, credentialism, exams, fair selection, and more generally whether all jobs should be considered as offices. In the sphere of what may be called internal labor justice, he takes into account the problems of the *distribution of hard work* and *workplace democracy*. I will consider both of these sides of the problem, and offer an assessment. Michael Walzer's views on labor justice mark a progression in the distributive debate; nonetheless, some limitations can be identified.

4.1. *External Labor Justice/ Justice of the Office: Jobs as a Universal Public Service?*

Importantly, in the domain of external justice, Walzer is not content with merely stating the principle of free occupational choice, as are other distributive theorists: rather, he identifies the normative tensions between the need for equality and the risks of dominance in access to occupations, attempting to balance the interests individuals have in avoiding tyranny with their interests in labor justice .

Walzer defines the office as "any position in which the political community as a whole takes an interest, choosing the person who holds it or regulating the procedures by which he is chosen" (Walzer 1989, 129). Since offices are a matter of public interest, they cannot be attributed to others at the discretion of private individuals or groups. Societies have historically attempted to set a limit to the level of discretion that can be used in allocating positions of office. This is, of course, a goal of modernity, for in the past positions of office were decided on grounds of membership to particular groups or monopolistic discretion (family, church, etc.). Exams and the market have replaced these old mechanisms of allocating offices. The idea is that clients, consumers and patients who depend on the work of office

holders have an interest in this universalization of 'fair selection'. Walzer considers the possibility of extending the model of office-allocation to society as a whole, including the sphere of work, as in the idea of a "universal civil service". He observes that *reconceptualizing every job as an office* is what most political philosophers think is fair (Walzer 1983, 131). Interestingly, he attributes this idea also to Rawls, but I have shown earlier that this is more problematic than it may at first seem (see Chapter I).

On this model, offices are scarce and society makes sure that they are allocated fairly, putting them under political scrutiny and legal restrictions. This process starts with professions, so that 'fair employment practices' are extended to other sorts of selection procedure. The overarching view is that 'any position for which people compete, and where the victory of one constitutes social or economic advantage over the others, must be distributed 'fairly', in accordance with advertised criteria and transparent procedures. (...) The goal is perfect meritocracy" (Walzer 1983, 131). Fair selection requires that "the sum of the available opportunities is divided by the number of interested citizens, and everyone is given the same chance of winning a place" (Walzer 1983, 132). Note that such restriction of arbitrary discretion and privilege requires the administration of exams, certifications, and selections.

While this "picture is not unattractive" (Walzer 1983, 132), Walzer only considers the idea of the extension of the office to the totality of occupations as an example of simple equality. And, first, it is still to be clarified that all occupations are indeed offices; second, one should defend meritocracy, which requires that the merits and talents needed for each office are identified. However, it is far from evident that they are actually 'merits', in that they would be more likely similar to result from a combination of chance, conformism, or ethical fit: "going to school, taking an examination, doing well in an interview, leading a disciplined life, and obeying orders" (Walzer 1983, 132). A "simple equality" alternative to this idea is that, rather than turning every job into an office and democratizing the selection, their distribution be done "by lottery or rotation, for example" (Walzer 1983, 133), as in ancient Greece. This was associated with a radical populism informed by resentment due to the awareness that office holders are often individuals coming from a privileged background, as well as a resentment against what Walzer calls "the insolence of the office"⁶⁹. Walzer recalls Lenin's idea that every literate person also be a bureaucrat, as well as Rousseau's argument that all ordinary citizens should take turns as teachers (Walzer 1983, 133). Their key argument is that "office holding itself, and not merely the power to distribute office, represents an unjustifiable monopoly" (Walzer 1983, 133). However, according to Walzer this idea can work only in simple societies, not in complex ones. And this would lead to the tyranny of commissaries. Rotation of office, like military conscription, can work only in some cases, and there is the significant problem of competence. Some offices require thorough training and special qualities, thus they cannot be easily universalized, and concerns about private life and economic activity may be raised for the rotation of the remaining offices. Simply put, not everyone can be a doctor, "even if the rigid hierarchy of the contemporary hospital is broken down" (Walzer 1983, 134).

In Walzer's view, simple equality in the sphere of office should be replaced by a more nuanced ideal, where a moderate democratization of the office co-exists with selection. Otherwise we would have the tyranny of the state, as well as a "dominance of talent or

⁶⁹ That is, "the special claims that office holders commonly make, that they are entitled to their offices and then to the authority and status that go with their offices, because they have been tested and certified in accordance with socially approved standards. Office is their achievement, and it marks them off as superior to their fellow citizens" (Walzer 1983, 133).

education” as qualities required for office. Ultimately, the problem is “not to break the monopoly of the qualified, but to set limits to their prerogatives” (Walzer 1983, 134). Indeed, if one considers the position of Paul Gomberg, even competence is not a good reason for rejecting rotation, because rotation should be precisely aimed at liberating time for the least advantaged so that they can get the training they need and gain competences (Gomberg 2007).

Walzer importantly acknowledges the limitations of the idea of meritocracy, and the highly problematic nature of credentials as a way of legitimating access to offices. The relationship between credentials and merit is a very problematic one, for meritocracy tends to give value to the correct fulfillment of the requirements of a particular exam, rather than to a capacity in itself. Examinations are the other side of meritocracy and universal civil service, because they aim to put offices and credentials under control. The lack of educational mobility is also highlighted, as well as the highly fortuitous way in which people end up entering certain occupations rather than others (Walzer 1983, 144). The Chinese system of examination shows that the allocation of offices through highly selective exams did not lead to proper meritocracy, since “what was tested, increasingly, was the ability to take a test” (Walzer 1983, 141). The ‘examination life’ is destined to change. Rather than fairly assessing candidates’ abilities, what we have is a conventional agreement over what should be considered a ‘merit’: “hence, it can’t be said that those who passed the examination deserved to hold an office; only that they were entitled to be considered for a range of offices” and, in the last analysis, “all such judgements were particularist and political in character” (Walzer 1983, 142). Therefore, “strictly speaking, there is no such thing as meritocracy” (Walzer 1983, 143).

As a result, given the impossibility of eliminating the discretionary and particularistic aspects of selection, and given that rotation is not a viable option for offices, Walzer argues that what should be done is, at the least, to contain the authority of committees. “To call a job an ‘office’, is to say only that discretionary authority has been politicized, not that it has been abolished” (Walzer 1983, 143-144). He thus defends the idea of *equal consideration*: all qualified candidates should be equally considered when applying for jobs, and all should have equal rights to apply for jobs. Even if not everyone will have “exactly the same share of available opportunities”, as simple equality requires, still some restrictions on the arbitrary and discretionary elements of selection are introduced.

Note that the principle of equal consideration is different from that of equality of opportunity, even if both may be understood as manifestations of the *external justice* thesis. Equal consideration exclusively concerns the procedures of selecting for office and their fairness. Equal opportunity concerns the means that individuals are given in the course of their lives in order to compete for positions in society on an equal basis. Both of them are thus in line with the external justice thesis, but at considerably different levels: the life span of an individual, on the one hand, and a single selective procedure on the other. Even if Walzer does not pay special attention to equality of opportunity, they can be considered as complementary principles.

The idea of a universal civil service is rejected by Walzer also for another reason. Procedures of selection normally required for office should not extend to *every* hiring process, for “it is obvious that jobs in stores, shops, and services are not distributed ‘fairly’” (161). In fact, in the petty-bourgeois economy, nepotism is “morally required”; there “discretion reigns supreme”, for occupations are essentially distributed through social networks (local connections, familial links, quarters, and so on). At most, given that Walzer defends workers’

control of the workplace, he nonetheless believes that even in the “factory commune” (161) the admission process should be held by the members. As a result, “it may well happen that at a given time, in a given place, the most successful factory will be run largely by Italians, say, or by Mormons. I don’t see anything wrong with that, so long as success isn’t convertible outside its proper sphere” (162).

Equal consideration, thus, has value only for certain offices in which consumers, clients and patients have an interest to control; for the myriad of small businesses that shape a country’s economy, it is not of value. Even if I acknowledge that implementing the principle of equal consideration may be hard at all levels, I find this idea hardly defensible, and this is so even for Walzerian reasons. Why shouldn’t it be seen as an invasion of the sphere of informal social networks into the sphere of the economy? It seems that the logic of the spheres seems to be applied by Walzer in a rather selective, if not arbitrary, way. After all, he explicitly acknowledges at the beginning of his book that there is no clear and defined criterion according to which the boundaries of the spheres are drawn. Thus, in a certain sense, his position does not claim absolute validity – as David Miller has observed, “Walzer does not claim that there is any decisive test that could prove unequivocally that his interpretation of justice is the best available” (Miller 1995, 10). Nonetheless, I find it hard to defend the principle of equal consideration as applying only in some cases and not others. Being excluded from social networks that mediate people’s access to jobs, and making such social networks intrinsically valid means of selecting, means certifying occupational segregation and unequal access to occupations as a matter of justice. Thus, Walzer’s arbitrarily selective application of the principle of equal consideration, which varies according to the size of the workplace, should be criticized because of *the tyranny of personal ties* and social connections (or “associational goods”, as Scanlon calls them, 2018), which tend to favor those with higher amounts of “social capital” (Bourdieu 2016 [1979]). They also roughly follow the principle of “similar prefers similar”, which is one of the chief reasons for objectionable occupational segregation (see Chapter IV). One may have the suspicion that, instead of complex equality, we have a form of selective equality.

In fact, in order to argue against the reservation of offices for individuals or groups – which is more generally known as affirmative action – Walzer says that the right to apply for an office should not be violated precisely on the ground of the principle of equal consideration. Disadvantaged groups, such as persons from certain races or religions (these are Walzer’s examples), may be reserved places in all competitions: this is the affirmative action view. However, this would immediately raise some problems, not only because it requires that members of these groups be distinguished by non-members through some formally established criteria, which may indeed exacerbate their social immobility (Walzer 1983, 151, footnote), but also because this would violate the rights of other candidates to equal consideration (Walzer 1983, 152). Given the problems with the reservation of offices, Walzer believes that it is better to pursue other routes, and to consider quotas for disadvantaged groups only as a last resort, once all the other possible policies have been implemented. Walzer also raises doubts about the true impacts such a measure would have, which, after all, would not threaten existing hierarchies since (“it poses no threat to established hierarchies or to the class structure as a whole” (Walzer 1983, 153). As a result, reservation would not ensure that “the last shall be the first; it will guarantee, at most, that the last shall be next to last” (154). I would add that Walzer’s rejection of the application of the principle of equal consideration in

the “economy of the petty bourgeoisie” would itself also contribute to the reiteration of socially established social hierarchies, as I will show in detail in Chapter IV when considering status-based occupational segregation.

In the domain of external labor justice, the tools that Walzer provides us with are thus:

- 1) the principle of equal consideration applied only to big businesses and offices;
- 2) a relativization of the “myth of meritocracy”, which translates into a concern for the limitation of the prerogatives of discretionary choice; and
- 3) the rejection of the extension of the selective procedures for offices to all occupations, and thus a selective application of the principle of equal consideration.

More generally, reading Walzer’s account, one can be convinced that “equality will always be rough” (Walzer 1983, 144), which, while on the one hand is hardly a contestable claim, should on the other hand not allow for arbitrarily selective applications of the principles. The criteria of the spheres, while brilliant, seem to escape public scrutiny and sometimes tend to be arbitrarily applied; the “tyrannies” that it is supposed to prevent, in fact, seem to be identified according to the preferences of the author rather than some publicly identifiable criterion.

Let us turn, now, to internal labor justice, mostly dealt with by Walzer with respect to two issues: the distribution of hard work, and workers’ control of the workplace.

4.2. *Internal Labor Justice/The Hard Work of the Worst Off: The Problem With the Distribution of “Negative Goods”*

To think about work in terms of the ethical requirements of “meaningful work” and self-realization is to think about work as a *positive good*. Most contemporary theories conceive of work in this way (see Chapter V), but Walzer, by contrast, addresses work as a *negative good*. Walzer is interested in the question, ‘how should hard work be distributed?’ rather than ‘what makes work meaningful?’ As I will discuss in Chapter V, most theories tend to ask the latter question and avoid the former.

“Hard work” is qualitatively different from other goods; it is a “negative good” because no one wants to do it, and yet it cannot be socially avoided. If in traditional distributive disputes around positive goods the problem is generally, ‘who will take this piece of the pie?’, in the case of negative goods the problem is rather ‘who should take this undesired burden?’ Redistribution does not fit the nature of hard work, Walzer says; there is no social meaning that can help here, for no one can be identified as being ‘entitled’ to hard work. This is another way to raise what I earlier called the ‘Somebody’s got to do it problem’ (SGP), a problem widely overlooked by distributive authors. It is the undesirable tasks – those that are hard, dangerous, dirty – that societies reserve for the least advantaged, which raises concerns for Walzer:

(...) the distribution goes against the grain of the (negative) good. Except in the case of punishment, it just isn’t possible to fit the distribution to the social meaning of the good, because there is no race or sex or caste and no conceivable set of individuals who can properly be singled out as society’s hard workers. No one qualifies – there is no Pascalian company – and so all of us, in different ways and on different occasions, have to be available. (Walzer 1983, 168)

Walzer distinguishes between “hard work”, “dangerous work”, and “dirty work”. Despite their differences, all of these occupations have some features in common:

- no one wants to perform them;

- they are socially necessary; and
- they are reserved for the least advantaged of society, the “reserve army”.

If a task is socially necessary, someone will have to perform it. The problem is, thus, deciding who will do it. The criterion that societies traditionally put in place for coping with the distribution of undesired work is an odious one: they attribute negative goods to the worst off. “The idea in all these cases is a cruel one: negative people for a negative good” (Walzer 1983, 166). Consider the following passage:

Hard work is distributed to degraded people. Citizens are set free; the work is imposed on slaves, resident aliens, “guest workers” – outsiders all. Alternatively, the insiders who do the work are turned into “inside” aliens, like the Indian untouchables or the American blacks after emancipation. (Walzer 1983, 165)

From these words, one can clearly see that Walzer addresses the problem of work as a problem of equality in the first place. He sees that, in a community of equals, no one can be said to be naturally suited for a particular set of tasks, especially if that tasks are socially undesired.

Thus, what is Walzer’s response to SGP? Walzer considers a variety of options. I find it useful to summarize them in the form of a list, because he focuses on them in a very unsystematic way (see Walzer 1983, Chap. 6):

- *automation*: work is automated through technological labor-saving devices;
- *rotation through conscription*: just like the conscriptive army during war-times, hard work is shared by all citizens;
- *domestic corvée* (cleaning): tasks are rotated at the restricted level of households, schools, companies, etc.;
- *national partial corvée*: there is a partial rotation of tasks at a national level;
- *workplace democracy*: all those who work in a company elect their managers;
- *leisure compensation*: hard work is compensated with higher shares of free time;
- *higher pay*: undesired tasks are better compensated financially in order to attract more (differentiated) people;
- *coordination with other activities*: hard work is connected with other, less difficult, activities.

According to Walzer, the complete application of these responses would result in a form of tyranny. Leaving aside automation (see §3 in this Chapter) and post-work utopia – which I discuss later in Chapter V) – Walzer considers the old egalitarian idea of rotating tasks among all the members of society, so that “an army of citizens will replace the reserve army of the proletariat” (Walzer 1983, 167). Even if he acknowledges it as “an attractive proposal”, it cannot be defended all the way. In his terms, the rotation of hard tasks among the members of society is an example of *simple equality*, and thus should be addressed in a complex way. Rotation through conscription would entail centralized control by the state, and so will the generalized application of the *corvée* as something like hard work as a national service. Interesting solutions also include compensating hard workers with larger amounts of free time and higher pay, and making their occupations more satisfying by mixing it with other, less ‘hard’ activities.

Walzer takes seriously all of these options but eventually concludes that a thorough application of each of them cannot be guaranteed without producing certain kinds of tyranny,

because of the centralized, detailed and intrusive control that the state would require. In such a context, the individual would have little choice.

Once again, however, the boundaries between the spheres and the corresponding tyrannies seem to be questionable. After all, the fact that hard work is the only option for the least advantaged may be considered a form of tyranny against them: they have no other options, and thus the sphere of work dominates over their lives, mediating their poor access to material resources, esteem, status, and power. Walzer would agree on this. What he does not agree on, is the idea that that the problem can be fixed through simple rotation. Rather, the response should be a complex one: “partial and symbolic sharing: the purpose is to break the link between dirty work and disrespect” (Walzer 1983, 175)⁷⁰.

4.2.1. *Guest Workers and “Inside Aliens”: Non-Membership as Labor Injustice*

Walzer considers guest work as a normative case within the sphere of membership. The case of guest workers (or migrant workers) shows that by not being legal members of a community, some groups are especially exposed to unfair work, occupying the lower ranks of the labor ladder. Special considerations are given to the guest professionals, whose global mobility gives them a number of privileges; recall Iris Marion Young’s distinction between professionals and nonprofessionals, as essentially a class distinction (Young 1990).

Host communities free-ride on the work of such workers. They give them the most degrading and undesired tasks, which legal members of the communities are pleased to avoid. Indeed, they can avoid such tasks precisely because others perform them. This provides them with an advantage that requires further scrutiny: after all, isn’t distributive justice primarily concerned with the fair distribution of social advantages?

One can clearly see how the labor ladder is structured around the distinction between those with member and non-member status. In particular, the case of guest workers is paradigmatic of a crucial intersection between *status inequality* (in this case due to membership exclusion) and what I have called *contributive inequality*. Walzer’s awareness of the intersection of status inequalities and contributive inequalities – a problem that I will address in detail in Chapter IV – is sociologically informed, historically aware and internally nuanced:

Because of their race or sex, or presumed intelligence, or social status, they deserve to do it, or they don’t deserve not to do it, or they somehow qualify for it. It’s not the work of citizens, free men, white men, and so on. But what sort of desert, what sort of qualification is this? It would be hard to say what the hard workers of this or any other society have done to deserve the danger and degradation their work commonly entails; or how they, and they alone, have qualified for it. What secrets have we learned about their moral character? When convicts do hard labor, we can at least argue that they deserve their punishment. But even they are not state slaves; their degradation is (most often) limited and temporary, and it is by no means clear that the most oppressive sorts of work should be assigned to them. And if not to them, surely to no one else. (Walzer 1983, 166)

⁷⁰ “We can share (and partially transform) hard work through some sort of national service; we can reward it with money or leisure; we can make it more rewarding by connecting it to other sorts of activity – political, managerial, and professional in character. We can conscript, rotate, cooperate, and compensate; we can reorganize the work and rectify its names. We can do all these things, but we will not have abolished hard work; nor will we have abolished the class of hard workers. The first kind of abolitionism is, as I have already argued, impossible; the second would merely double hardness with coercion. The measures that I have proposed are at best partial and incomplete. They have an end appropriate to a negative good: a distribution of hard work that doesn’t corrupt the distributive spheres with which it overlaps, carrying poverty into the sphere of money, degradation into the sphere of honor, weakness and resignation into the sphere of power.” (Walzer 1983, 183)

The logic of outsourcing is contained within the intersection between status and contributive inequality. Walzer correctly diagnoses the *cumulative* features of the inequalities endured by guest workers, and the fact that they are reflected in all spheres (economic, social, etc.): “the denial of membership is always the first of a long train of abuses” (Walzer 1983, 62). This can also be appreciated on a global level, for the most undesired work is outsourced to the countries in the Global South. He sees that the way the division of labor is organized is unfair, and that contributive unfairness often intersects with non-membership; undesired labor tends to be reserved for “aliens”, either “internal” (see next paragraph) or external⁷¹. The remedy that Walzer suggests in this case is to make membership easier for guest workers. Guest workers participate in the economies of the countries that hosts them, thus, “they ought to be able to regard themselves as potential or future participants in politics as well. (...) They must be set on the road to citizenship”. According to Walzer, it is important to conceptualize the response to this problem as not one of “mutual aid” but rather of “political justice”. This applies also to hard workers, who will never be equal members of a community as long as they exempt others from the dirty work they don’t want to do.

For Walzer, what is wrong in the case of guest work is that the logic of the sphere of membership interferes with the freedom of guest workers. This leads to the tyranny of members over non-members. The solution, thus, would be to gradually extend membership to non-members: this way, guest workers could take part in collective bargaining so that they could fight to improve their working conditions. This goal may also be pursued by means of international treaties between host and home countries, which guarantee a “list of ‘guest rights’” so as to extend the same rights of citizens to guest workers. But this would once again put them in direct competition with domestic workers, so that what Walzer calls the “initial dilemma” is back⁷²:

Democratic citizens, then, have a choice: if they want to bring in new workers, they must be prepared to enlarge their own membership; if they are unwilling to accept new members, they must find ways within the limits of the domestic labor market to get socially necessary work done. And those are their only choices. (Walzer 1983, 61)

I am not sure that the only boundaries to be considered here are those of membership. To be sure, the boundary between citizens and non-citizens is particularly odious when we see that non-citizens are often burdened with undesirable tasks, for it is clear that societies free-ride on non-citizens’ work while still denying them the status of peers. But it is questionable to think that once such legal boundaries are over, fairness in the division of labor is guaranteed. I am not convinced that providing people with citizenship prospects would actually integrate them fairly into the labor market. A rights-centered view may compensate people with citizenship, but underestimate the pervasiveness of other kinds of status problems (relating to race, gender, ethnicity and so on). I will address this problem in detail in Chapter IV. Granted, Walzer is certainly well aware of the complexities of status inequalities and of their intermeshing with labor inequalities. For instance, he says that “in the world of citizens,

⁷¹ See Walzer’s illuminating account on guest workers in Walzer 1983, 56-58.

⁷² “No democratic state can tolerate the establishment of a fixed status between citizen and foreigner (thought there can be stages in the transition from one of these political identities to the other). Men and women are either subject to the state’s authority, or they are not; and if they are subject, they must be given a say, and ultimately an equal say, in what that authority does. Democratic citizens, then, have a choice: if they want to bring in new workers, they must be prepared to enlarge their own membership; if they are unwilling to accept new members, they must find ways within the limits of the domestic labor market to get socially necessary work done. And those are their only choices.” (Walzer 1983, 56-58)

personal service is demeaning” (Walzer 1983, 277). He sees that citizenship, and the idea of universality of rights that it entails (at least inside the country), is incompatible with the caste order, where some were asked to be servants of others. Nonetheless, citizenship rights are far from being sufficient to ensure fair social cooperation; status inequality goes beyond the citizen/non-citizen boundary.

Take, for instance, the case of racialized workers and women, who suffer from occupational segregation *even while being fully-fledged citizens* from a formal point of view. Also, growing parts of the global population, which previously benefited from social protections and regulated working conditions, are increasingly losing their previously acquired rights, thus becoming “aliens” in their own countries *despite their formal status as citizens*: Guy Standing has recalled the concept of “denizenship” in order to describe the paradox of being increasingly deprived of rights, while still being formally a citizen (Standing 2014). Clearly, membership is far from fixing unequal divisions of labor grounded in status inequality. Once again, the concept of status exploitation (see §1) proves useful, in that it makes it clear that there is indeed a sort of *stratified contributive citizenship*: even if we are all formally citizens, some are “more citizens than others” when it comes to work.

Nonetheless, it would be unfair to attribute to Walzer a merely formal understanding of citizenship (Miller 1995). In Walzer’s view, one cannot be a servant and at the same time a citizen. ‘Inside aliens’ like women and “denizens” cannot participate in social cooperation as peers merely by seeing their citizenship rights guaranteed. While certainly they represent a fundamental strand of the problem, the question of the fairness of participating in social cooperation is broader than the question of citizenship and rights. This is proved by the fact that *citizens themselves* suffer from exploitation and oppression – this is the case for hard workers, but also for women.

Walzer acknowledges that women’s overburden of housework is a case of hard work being unfairly distributed; women, he says, are the traditional example of “‘inside’ aliens”, for they do the work that men disdain, thereby allowing them to devote themselves to economic and public activities. Moreover, when discussing the *kibbutz* option – the historically realized experiment of Jewish communities collectivizing work – as an example of successful task sharing within a community, he observes that such success did not extend to sharing housework, for *significantly*, the *kibbutz* experiment ended up requiring longer rounds for women (1 year) and shorter rounds for men (2 or 3 months) (Walzer 1983, chap. 6). Walzer says that this is not a problem since it is freely chosen. According to Susan Moller Okin, Walzer does not pay sufficient attention to the issue of the gendered division of labor when considering the issue of hard work (Okin 1989, 114). Also, most of his attention is directed towards unfairly distributed *paid* work (see Okin 1989, 111 ff.). Note also that he sees any kind of domestic service as a “little tyranny” and considers low-paid and low-status domestic labor of disadvantaged women unacceptable, thus he disapproves of daycare in that it would be “likely to result in a great loss of love”. Also in this case, his response is that of a domestic *corvée*, and throughout society hard work is to be shared “at least in some partial and symbolic sense”. Walzer’s dismissal of daycare seems not to be justified: like Susan Moller Okin, I find that his proposals can be accepted (“if the sharing is real and complete rather than ‘partial and symbolic’”, Okin 1989, 116) but that he should have furtherly problematized the daycare issue. As Okin observes, “This sharing is necessary if Walzer’s separate spheres criterion for justice is to be fully met: if a society of equal men and women is to distribute its social goods in such

a way that what happens within the family is not to dominate over and invade all the other spheres” (Okin 1989, 116).

Let us turn to the workplace. Walzer positively considers the idea of workers’ control of the workplace, to the point that, in his view, employees should democratically elect their managers. This idea extends the political right of the vote to workers, and thus contributes to the reflection on workplace democracy (Cohen 1989; Pateman 1970; Bowles and Gintis 1993). More precisely, it provides “complex equality” arguments for workplace democracy. As Robert Mayer has observed, this allows Walzer to extend the scope of his normative analysis of work beyond concerns for the least advantaged (guest workers, dirty workers), so as to include a broader range of groups, with different rates of income (Mayer 2001). However, this position has received many criticisms, particularly with respect to whether or not it truly represents the “shared understandings” of society: for instance, Michael Rustin (1995) and Brian Barry (1995) agree that most Americans today do not share the idea that workers should elect their managers. According to Mayer, a more thorough application of complex equality would require welfare state capitalism rather than workplace democracy, the latter being an example of simple equality indeed (Mayer 2001).

These criticisms correctly point to two intrinsic limitations of Walzer’s account: first, by attributing almost exclusive normative weight to actual shared understandings, it is inherently exposed to the risk of conservatism (see also Dworkin 1983; Miller 1995); second, not providing clear criteria on the functioning of the spheres, their relationships, and the precise applications of complex equality, its normative indeterminacy is inherently exposed to the risk of arbitrariness. Competing interpretations of what “complex equality” means for each case, for example, seem not to be counterbalanced by a clear criterion which provides directions for its correct application. Furthermore, as Amy Gutmann has effectively observed, “social justice is more complex than complex equality admits (...). The social meanings of some goods are multiple and the multiple meanings sometimes conflict” (Gutmann 1995, 99). The idea of complex equality does not itself provide us with tools to adjudicate between conflicting meanings.

Nonetheless, consider the following passage, according to which justice requires:

A decentralized democratic socialism; a strong welfare state run, at least in part, by local and amateur officials; a constrained market; an open and demystified civil service; independent public schools; the sharing of hard work and free time; the protection of religious and familial life; a system of public honoring and dishonoring free from considerations of rank or class; workers’ control of companies and factories; a politics of parties, movements, meetings and public debate. (Walzer 1983, 318)

We have reasons to believe that such ideas are far from conservative (see Miller 1995). To Dworkin’s reproach that his theory merely invites societies to look at themselves in the mirror, Walzer responds that “a mirror is a critical instrument” (Dworkin 1983; Walzer 2013). In any case, this would mean that criteria according to which the social meanings of goods are determined should be made transparent.

4.3. *Walzer’s Multidimensionality: The Case of Professionalism*

Among distributive thinkers, Walzer is also the most open to multidimensional considerations. Not only does he address the problem of hard work as involving fundamental

concerns besides income such as self-respect and social dignity, but he extends these considerations also to the idea of power. Note that in his account, work does not constitute a sphere in its own right: rather, *it crosscuts a number of spheres*. This allows him to give an account of the pervasivity of normative issues of work. This way, Walzer seems well equipped to address problems of labor justice in a multidimensional way. Far from thinking of work as merely raising concerns of income, he is aware that “what makes the distribution of office so important is that so much else is distributed along with office (or some offices): honor and status, power and prerogative, wealth and comfort” (Walzer 1983, 155). In this “so much else” lies Walzer’s commitment to what I call multidimensionality.

Multidimensionality is distinctively articulated by Walzer with respect to the problem of professionalism, even if it is present also in his consideration of hard work, since it is associated with “carrying poverty into the sphere of money, degradation into the sphere of honor, weakness and resignation into the sphere of power” (183). Importantly, Walzer bases his observations on Everett Hughes’ studies on professionalism and the struggle over the monopoly of access into occupations. Professionalism is described as “a form of artificial maintenance” of skills and expertise gaps, as well as

an ethical code, a social bond, a pattern of mutual regulation and self-discipline. But sure the chief purpose of professional organization is to make a particular body of knowledge the exclusive possession of a particular body of men (more recently, of women, too). (Walzer 1983, 155-156).

These rewards are: the satisfaction of the performance in itself; the salary; status; and power. Thus consider, first, “the performance itself, the actual work for which he [the office holder] has prepared” (Walzer 1983, 155). Second, by restricting access to offices through exams, fees, an emphasis on credentials and other particular requirements, professionals become motivated by higher salaries. Third, theirs is also a claim to professional status: professionals “seek a place in a hierarchy and shape their work to the heights they hope to attain” (156). The hierarchy of status, however, has its roots in the educational system (“doctors and nurses offer a useful example of closely connected professionals with nontransferable certificates. Professionalism, then, is a way of drawing lines”) (156). Finally, professionalism is also a way to establish relationships of power:

Properly speaking, they issue commands to their subordinates, but only hypothetical imperatives to clients. If you want to get well, they say, do this and this. But the greater the distance they are able to establish, the greater the secrets at their command, the less hypothetical their imperatives are. Contemptuous of our ignorance, they simply tell us what to do. (156)

What normative problems does professionalism raise? In Walzer’s account, it is the possibility that their competence translates into tyranny: “we do want qualified people to serve as bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, teachers, and so on, but we don’t want these people to rule over us” (156-157). Therefore, it is with respect to the four rewards of the profession that Walzer draws his boundaries of justice:

1) whereas professionals are certainly entitled to the pleasure of the performance, they cannot heighten that pleasure at the expense of others – “they serve communal purposes, and so their work is subject to the control of the citizens of the community” (157);

2) by excluding many people from a particular social office, professionals have pushed up their income, but wage differentials between offices and other occupations should be reduced

(as in the Paris 1871 commune, “the public service should be done at workmen’s wages”, Walzer argues for a reduction of the wage gap) (157);

3) there is nothing wrong with honor in itself, but it should be rewarded on the grounds of professionals’ performance rather than their positions (“to insist upon honor without regard to performance is one of the most common forms of official insolence”, 157); and

4) as professionals and office holders exercise power, their functions should be subject to public scrutiny (“they can only do their job properly if they don’t do it alone”); also, their specialized knowledge should be redistributed and their work made more cooperative, because “office is a form of service and not yet another occasion for tyranny” (157).

These requirements can be labelled as: *public control of functions*, *reduction of the wage gap*; and the *achievement principle*. I will critically address the achievement principle in Chapter III, and I will consider the problem of wages at the end of this chapter; as for the problem of the public control of functions, it seems to be hardly questionable. Walzer’s multidimensionality is thus one that considers the normative issues at stake in professionalism from the perspective of the four rewards that it involves. However, two limitations may be identified.

First, only certain kinds of work, and not others, are assessed in multidimensional terms – namely, hard work and office. Constraints, for Walzer, concern professionals and office holders, that is, workers that are regulated by codes and forms of public control since theirs is a service of public interest, not all kinds of work. But multidimensionality should apply to all kinds of work.

Second, Walzer’s multidimensionality is still essentially distributive. That is, the plurality of spheres are presented as concerning goods to be distributed. Although many spheres are taken into consideration, the general presupposition is that it is always a question of goods to be allocated (even immaterial goods of status and respect). For example, recognition constitutes a distinctive sphere in its own right, but it is understood as something that can be allocated, and the same can be said of the good of the family (see also Young 1990, 17 ff.). In Walzer’s own words, “when all social goods, from membership to political power, are distributed for the right reasons, then the conditions of self-respect will have been established as best they can be” (Walzer 1983, 278). This distributive conception of self-respect – which resonates with Rawls’ “social basis of self-respect” (Chapter I) – overlooks the qualitative and relational aspects involved, by representing self-respect as a collateral feature of the goods.

There may thus remain a reasonable doubt that all dimensions can be well addressed under the same allocative logic. Despite his pluralism, Walzer’s is a *one-dimensional multidimensionality*, in that the plurality of spheres is always subsumed under a wider dimension, that of distribution. This way, however, one loses sight of some key issues regarding labor justice. First of all, with these tools one is limited to addressing the problems of labor justice as simply problems of allocating positions (Young 1990). But this is not the only dimension of labor justice. In fact, inequality in the allocation of positions necessarily goes with other dynamics that exceed the distributive understanding of positions: consider, for instance, how certain positions are presented as being better ‘suited’ to certain social groups, such as migrants and persons of color, or men and women, and thus more broadly the social construction of the match between social types and occupations (Young 1990). Such meanings are not neutral; they are socially constructed through biased understandings of the opportune match between people’s status and their position in the division of labor (see Chapter IV). Also, the essentially static character of the problem of ‘positions’ fails to recognise

the processes and structures that play a role in the reproduction of the inequalities which distributive justice is supposed to redress.

Thus with Iris Marion Young (1990) I argue that we can distinguish between a *distributive* and a *nondistributive* side of labor justice. The distributability thesis, despite its development in liberal-egalitarian, socialist, and allocative models, and its applications in Walzer's framework, is philosophically limited. The nondistributive sides of justice may be indicated in the dimensions which should not be merely thought of as "rewards of the profession" but also as involving distinct normative logics – relational, political, and contributive as I propose. Likewise, status and esteem should not be merely considered as allocations of honor, but more precisely as involving issues of relational justice, aimed at understanding the quality of social relations. As for power, it should not be understood as slots of power owned by certain persons, but as structurally embedded asymmetries of control and decision-making. Finally, what Walzer calls quite vaguely the "satisfaction of the performance" should be more appropriately considered as involving the quality and quantity of contribution. This is a first, rough formulation of what I will develop in Chapter V as a multidimensional view of labor justice.

4.4. *Unfair Divisions of Labor: A Problem of Equality*

Walzer addresses the problem of work as a problem of *equality in the division of labor*, which, as we have seen so far, most distributive theorists overlook. In fact, they (1) tend to address the issue of equality mostly in terms of *what people own rather than what they do*, and (2) they address issues work mostly in terms of *freedom and autonomy*. This sensitivity to problems of labor inequality makes Walzer's reflections particularly original in a context that tends to naturalize them. On his view, despite the overarching distributive language, work is not considered only as a matter of income or educational opportunities. In his account, there is no advocacy of the *derivative, personal preference, or external justice* theses. Rather, he advocates the *distributability* thesis, arguing that some partial or symbolic rotation of hard tasks should be realized.

It is important, for instance, that Walzer sees hard work as raising a fundamental problem of equality in the political community: "the question, in a society of equals, who will do the dirty work? has a special force. And the necessary answer is that, at least in some partial and symbolic sense, we will all have to do it. (...) Otherwise, the men and women who do it not only for themselves but for everyone else, too, will never be equal members of the political community" (Walzer 1983, 174). In this way, Walzer raises the question in terms of *social equality*: the fact in itself that the less desired tasks are socially reserved for some social groups, thereby exempting others from performing them, is read as a problem of equality in the political community, essentially showing that hard workers are treated as inferiors in the social hierarchy, as I will argue in Chapter IV. At least implicitly, this also seems to be Walzer's position. Note that the norm of free occupational choice lacks the tools to regard hard work as a problem: if no one legally forces hard workers to perform their work, no claims of injustice can be raised. Broadly speaking, reframing the issue of work in terms of equality beyond the idea of equality of opportunity is thus a progression with respect to the liberal-egalitarian, socialist and allocative models. Rawls, Roemer, Arneson and Van Parijs raise the question of work, if at all, exclusively in terms of freedom. In their view, what people do is entirely up to them: free occupational choice and value pluralism constitute everything there

is to say on the subject. However, as I observed earlier, despite its great importance, freedom is not sufficient. When addressing questions of justice and equality in terms of goods to be redistributed, they exclude work from the index of the *distribuenda* because of concerns for free occupational choice and value pluralism. And in this way, they lack the tools necessary to address work in terms of equality. This is a major shortcoming.

As mentioned, Walzer's account of inequality is complex. He is aware of the complex intermeshing between status and contributive inequalities, and of mechanisms of status exploitation, without confining his view to social class, even though he is not a theorist of exploitation like John Roemer. From this perspective, one may say that, even though he is a liberal thinker, he looks far more egalitarian than egalitarians themselves, particularly in comparison to Roemer.

Walzer attempts to keep together concerns of equality with concerns of fairness in the division of labor, without sacrificing the liberal concern of free occupational choice. In fact, besides his commitment to equality, Walzer remains a liberal thinker. Even if he believes that some forms of labor redistribution should be put in place, he is far from defending a system of public appointment of jobs. Quite obviously, the market is the favored route for labor allocation: "*the assignment of work is even more likely than the assignment of things to be experienced as an act of tyranny*" (Walzer 1983, 116). Thus Walzer too argues for the principle of free choice of the occupation. This way, he shows that one can be open to some egalitarian redistributive options while still defending free occupational choice. Instead of merely overlooking the problem, he addresses the question, 'how do we reconcile occupational freedom with fairness in the division of labor?' Other distributive authors have avoided this fundamental question.

Distributive Models	Free occupational choice	Fair division of labor	Equality
Liberal-Egalitarian (John Rawls)	x	/	Index of primary goods/ Economic and human capital (<i>difference principle</i>)
Socialist/Luck Egalitarian (John Roemer)	x	/	Profits and opportunities (<i>equality of opportunity</i>)
Socialist/Luck Egalitarian (Richard Arneson)	x	/	Resources (<i>equality of welfare</i>)
Allocative (Philippe Van Parijs)	x	/	Cash money (<i>allocative equality</i>)
Pluralist (Michael Walzer)	x	x	Social goods, partially including hard work (<i>complex equality</i>)

In Walzer's account, work has a place as a key issue and is addressed mostly as a problem of inequality, which, as we have seen, is rather unusual among distributive thinkers. This places

Walzer far from the *private preference*, the *derivative*, and potentially to the *external justice* views. He partially Walzer argues partially for what I have called the *distributability* thesis, i.e. he believes that work is a good that should be legitimately part of the *distribuenda* of justice, even though in limited ways. The discussion in Chapter I has shown that it is hard, or at least controversial, to attribute this thesis to Rawls, for his list of primary goods does not include an unequivocal reference to work. The same can be said of market socialists, luck egalitarians, as well as UBI advocates.

	Normative Differentiation /Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Internal Justice
Pluralist Model	Partially met	x	x	Partially met

The fact that Walzer’s account tends to at least partially meet all the conditions required for labor justice, does not mean that he provides a fully satisfying account of labor justice. In fact, as I have shown, his multidimensionality remains fundamentally one-dimensional. Likewise, its “internal labor justice” does not go beyond a relatively weak commitment to a partial or symbolic rotation of hard tasks, and to a selectively applied principle of equal consideration in selective processes. A more substantive analysis might be developed with respect to his method and to the conflicting meanings that may exist around the good “work”. As Amy Gutmann has compellingly shown, the good “productive employment in the USA” elicits conflicting meanings: for some, jobs are seen as careers, as in the “careers open to talent” view; work is a *need* in contexts where employment falls short; and preferential hiring in the sense of affirmative action conveys another meaning, which is neither one of qualification nor of need. These three meanings, thus, enter into competition with each other, and it is not sufficient to look at them in order to get the appropriate criteria of distribution (Gutmann 1995).

5. Conclusion: The Distributive Dimension of Labor Justice

This part of the thesis has considered the ways in the issues of work and the division of labor are approached by different representative distributive models of justice, in order to assess whether a conception of *labor justice as distribution* could work. I have shown that liberal and socialist thinkers essentially agree that justice should “stop at the door of work”, and that in some cases, liberal thinkers are even more egalitarian than egalitarians themselves on the subject. I have identified a common core of underlying views on the subject, showing that, despite their differences, distributive approaches essentially converge on some basic normative assumptions about work. I have labelled these assumptions the *private preference*, *derivative*, and *external justice* theses, while the *distributability* thesis is rather less shared. I have provided arguments against each of these theses, showing that they should be overcome for labor justice (except for the *distributability* thesis, which should be integrated into a wider theory) and that they should leave room for alternative conditions for labor justice.

Against the *private preference* thesis, I have argued that work should be considered a social relation in the first place, and should not be reduced to a solipsistic preference of individuals. Self-realization is neither necessary nor unique as a defense for a normative perspective on

work, and the antithesis between work and value pluralism should be overcome, for it does not justify the exclusion of work from the scope of justice. Against the *derivative* thesis, I have argued that each dimension of justice should be considered relatively autonomous, that is, as *not* reducible to other dimensions, neither in the form of a “ripple effect” (the idea that by fixing distribution, justice at work will naturally follow) nor in the form of one-dimensionality (i.e. the view that matters of distribution, for example, are the only proper matters of justice). Against the *external justice* thesis, I have argued that confining the gaze of justice to outside of the door of work leaves untouched norms, practices, and situations that should be addressed in their own right, if the reproduction of certain unjust inequalities it to be prevented. Finally, I have suggested that the *distributability* thesis should be complemented with a multidimensional awareness, which acknowledges the sphere of work raises questions and concerns that go beyond distribution. The personal preference, derivative, and external justice views are in one way or another defended by most of the approaches considered earlier: the market socialist, UBI and liberal-egalitarian models. However, of the positions analyzed, only one defends the thesis that certain occupations should be liable to (limited) forms of redistribution (the *distributability thesis*).

With the exception of the *distributability* thesis, the theses mentioned do not require any transformation of the internal structures of work, nor do they call labor inequalities into question. What these principles defend is the freedom of individuals in the labor market and the need to make sure that fairness in “starting conditions” is met. Also, all of these principles tend to ground their considerations of work in a norm of *freedom*. *Equality* enters the picture only in terms of the “opportunities” – namely economic and educational resources – that people should have in order to compete. “Contributive justice tests” put against the distributive models have shown that *there is no obvious connection between material fairness and contributive justice*; nonetheless, I have argued that material fairness is a necessary condition for labor justice.

Let me make some further remarks about the distributability thesis. An unanswered question put to most distributive approaches is concerns socially necessary labor – work that is not likely to be automated and which is necessary for society’s unavoidable needs to be met, such as teaching, producing food, constructions, cleaning, and so on. Even in conditions of economic prosperity, socially necessary tasks would raise normative problems about who should perform them. I have called this the “somebody’s got to do it problem” (SGP). Suppose that in a “Distributive Island” everyone unconditionally and regularly receives cash money without working. Surfers, artists, writers and artisans live in the island freely enjoying the seaside and nature without having to find a job. In this context, who will do the necessary work? Who will build the infrastructure to bring, for example, water to reach each house? Who will clean the streets? Who will look after the dependent elderly? Who will teach the kids? The principles of equality of opportunity, free occupational choice, and “exit choice” avoid answering these questions. A tension between the principle of free choice of occupation and SGP is somewhat inherent to any liberal perspective on labor justice. Indeed, it is hard to keep together concerns of freedom with concerns of labor justice. For on the one hand, conscripting people to perform socially necessary work would most likely be experienced as an act of tyranny and yet, on the other hand, some tasks are socially necessary so that someone must perform them. Justice requires that no one performs such tasks because of one’s social, economic, and cultural background, as it was in rank societies. And yet, this still seems to be

the case. Theorists of justice usually overlook this problem. As seen earlier, Rawls does not recognize it, nor do luck egalitarians or UBI advocates. Yet, the SGP raises important problems to their views. If no answer can be given, then a normative ‘vacuum’ is left in distributive debates. Why is it that important? Because the socially necessary tasks are performed by the most socially disadvantaged groups, and society free-rides on their work. Most of us can devote our lives to other tasks because someone else will do them.

This tension has been highlighted by Lucas Stanczyk in his article “Productive Justice” (2012). If everyone agrees that all societies should guarantee some form of welfare to all, and if such welfare necessarily requires some work to be performed (welfare cannot be decoupled from some essential services, i.e. health, teaching, cleaning, etc.), this cannot be but in tension with the principle of free choice of the occupation. There is, thus, a contributive-distributive conflict, so to speak, that is first of all a problem of navigating between individual aspirations and social needs.

In the absence of a principle that resolves the “somebody’s got to do it problem”, certain ideologies that offer supposed answers are likely to gain traction, such as those that preach women’s “natural predisposition” for carework, and those that accuse strangers of “stealing work” and of thus being deserving of less valued tasks. In the Distributive Island, in the absence of contributive principles, socially necessary tasks would end up being reserved for the most socially vulnerable groups. *The “Distributive Island” would not be an island of real freedom because material equality would not be accompanied by contributive justice.* Even though it is not the only problem of labor justice, SGP makes clear the limitations of the distributive perspective when we are asked to respond to questions which are contributive in character. Michael Walzer’s intuitions on the redistribution of hard work may provide some response – despite the limitations that I identified in the earlier paragraph.

The *personal preference*, *derivative*, and *external justice* theses are strictly related to one another.

Distributive models	Work is a personal preference outside the realm of justice	Derivative thesis: labor justice follows from the distribution of other goods	External justice: work is to be addressed in the “before” or “after” of work	Distributability: some occupations should be at least partially redistributed
Liberal-Egalitarian	x	x	x	/
Socialist-Luck Egalitarian	x	x	x	
Pluralist	/	/	/	x
Allocative	x	x	x	

This scheme shows at least two things. First, there is a sort of internal solidarity between these views. There are inherent reasons for which these theses are related to one another. *If* justice does not concern work (*personal preference*), then the most that can be done is to intervene *before* people enter work (*external justice*), and to do this via the distribution of certain goods one way or another connected with work (skills, income, and so on – the *derivative*

thesis). If some kinds of work are distributed (*distributability*), the fact that work is not merely a matter of personal preference is acknowledged, along with the insufficiency of the derivative and external views. I have shown that these assumptions motivate the exclusion of work from the scope of justice. Second, this scheme clearly shows that there is a wide unanimity on the subject among distributive theorists, to the point that liberals and egalitarians agree, with the sole partial exception of Walzer.

Following from these arguments, I have suggested the following conditions for reframing the debate so as to include concerns of labor justice:

- the *interdependence* condition vs the private preference thesis (work is seen as a social relation in the first place, instead of a mere subjective preference);
- the *pragmatic pluralism* condition vs paternalistic interpretations of what work should mean for the individuals (there is no need to embrace a strongly perfectionist view of the meaning of work for individuals);
- the *normative differentiation* condition vs the derivative thesis (fixing redistribution, labor justice would not automatically follow);
- the *internal justice* perspective beyond the external justice thesis (labor's internal rules are to be addressed in their own right, "beyond the door of work"); and
- the *multidimensionality* condition beyond the distributability thesis (even though it raises distributive concerns, work should not be reduced to a merely distributive issue).

These "conditions" show that labor justice cannot enter the agenda unless some shifts are made in the representation of what justice is and how should it be addressed. If distributive theorists had embraced such conditions, they would not have excluded work from their theories of justice.

In arguing that the distributive paradigm does not suffice when it comes to issues of work, I have certainly not argued for the mere dismissal of the distributive paradigm as such. Rather, I have shown that labor justice *does* require some distributive conditions to be met. I have attempted to show that the distributive approach provides us with key resources that should be rescued for a conception of labor justice. Distributive justice is an essential, although not sufficient, strand of labor justice, because work cannot be fair without some form of material equality, without which there is no real freedom of occupational choice; in addition, work cannot be fair if wages and socially produced wealth are not subject to public scrutiny. Likewise, labor cannot be fair if equality and freedom are not ensured before work, and some redistribution of undesired tasks is ensured. The resources provided by the distributive approach can be referred to as the *economic-distributive strand of labor justice*.

The distributive elements that can be drawn from the discussion can be summed up as follows:

a) *External distributive labor justice*:

- Free occupational choice: No one can be forced into an occupation against their will.
- Equal freedom from material need for real free occupational choice: When one is subject to the demands of basic needs, one cannot freely choose their occupation. Thus, this requires unconditional forms of redistribution.
- Equality of opportunity: All should be provided with the educational, social, and economic means needed to contribute on a par with others.
- Equal consideration: All should be equally considered in selective procedures for positions, even though discretion cannot be eliminated.

b) *Internal distributive labor justice:*

- Fair access to the outcomes of one's contribution: A worker's contribution entitles them to a fair share of the value they helped to produce.
- Fair access to socially produced wealth: A redistribution of the profits produced by society as a whole may enter the scope of labor justice, beyond the sufficientarian model.
- Redistribution of socially segregated tasks: Labor justice raises concerns for a fairer distribution of positions and tasks in society.

Some of these normative elements are interdependent. For example, one cannot freely choose their occupation without having their material needs met. Material need can, in fact, restrict workers' choice in such a way that they are not be free to choose their occupations: rather, they are forced into occupations due to the pushing power of basic need. I have not argued in detail for each of these measures. What I have done, rather, is discern some key distributive elements for labor justice from the models considered so far. They may be said to provide *labor justice reasons for distributive patterns*. Determining which interpretations of these principles best represent the claims for labor justice is a matter for public democratic decision-making.

For each of these elements comprising the distributive strand of labor justice, one may discern two levels of accomplishment: *affirmative* and *transformative* levels. This distinction has been inspired by Nancy Fraser's work (see Fraser 2003). The affirmative level does not affect the causes of labor injustice, but intervenes exclusively on its effects. The transformative level rather affects the causes of labor injustice, changing the structures and thus preventing the reproduction of injustice. Thus, the same elements, or alternative elements, may be considered on a scale of affirmative and transformative accomplishment. For example, the affirmative concept of free occupational choice would simply not legally force anyone into an occupation (which is what most distributive theorists are concerned with). This would hardly suffice for real free occupational choice, and thus would not really change current structures. The transformative level would entail the more demanding freedom from material need, which *really* allows people to have choice. Also, the idea of fair access to socially produced wealth may be affirmatively considered as requiring moderate forms of redistribution of profits through taxes, as already happens in our societies. Transformatively, however, such redistribution would be proportionate to the profits actually produced by society as a whole, as in Roemer's proposal.

In the following scheme, I sketch out a possible typology, to be considered as a mere suggestion drawn from the discussion, requiring further, detailed scrutiny. Being rather indeterminate, each of the elements included would need further exploration and debate, which I will not provide here. Of course, this scheme entails exclusively distributive considerations, whereas the following chapters will involve more elements:

Distributive-economic conditions of labor justice	Affirmative	Transformative
Freedom from material need	Not being legally forced into an occupation	Being provided with the material means for avoiding the demands of need when choosing an occupation

Equality of opportunity	Equal access to educational and economic means	Equal access to desired positions in the division of labor
Fair access to the outcomes of one's contribution	Workers receive a fair return from the outcome of their contributions	Considerably reducing the wage gap between occupational groups
Fair access to socially produced wealth	Redistribution of wealth through taxes	Social dividend as a matter of citizenship
Redistribution of segregated tasks and occupations	Equal consideration, affirmative action	Rotation, "universal civil service"

Note that I have included "equal consideration" in the affirmative strategies of redistribution of tasks and occupations, instead of considering it as an autonomous condition. In fact, being equally considered when applying for a job, may be considered a basic, affirmative way to cope with the problem of occupational segregation. Its "affirmative" nature is due to the fact that it is not likely to change labor inequalities, for it merely intervenes as an external principle of fair access (which is already the law in most countries, without substantively fixing occupational segregation).

Each of these elements requires separate, extensive consideration. Determining what would constitute fair access to the outcomes of one's contribution, for instance, may be a tricky and difficult question, requiring extensive analysis by itself. Addressing all of this here would take us far from our purpose, which is to assess whether or not labor justice as distribution may work, and which elements of this view are to be included as conditions for labor justice. I have shown that distribution can only address certain problems, and that the broad way in which the question is currently framed needs to be rethought. I have provided some tools towards this end.

Let us turn now to what is lacking. As Iris Marion Young has observed, the division of labor raises both distributive and nondistributive concerns (Young 1990). The distributive paradigm overlooks:

1. The relational side of work and the division of labor: recognition, status, social esteem, and the roles they play in reproducing labor inequalities.
2. Power, control, and decision-making processes.
3. The organizational structures of the divisions of labor; the nature of tasks and occupations; labor time; and the socially interdependent nature of work.

I have shown that all of these nondistributive elements are, in one way or another, overlooked, neglected or insufficiently addressed by distributive models. They can be referred to as the *relational*, *political*, and *contributive* dimensions of labor justice. The lack of a genuine relational dimension in the distributive paradigm is shown by the essentially distributive way in which these models respond to issues of status, recognition, and self-respect, as if they were distributable goods, and not distinctively rooted in social relations. The lack of a socially interdependent perspective on work, moreover, has made it clear that distributive theorists tend to conceive of individuals as preceding the goods to which they are entitled (Young 1990). Such essentially atomistic anthropology fails to grasp the socially interdependent nature of work and the connections that it establishes between individuals, what they do, and their positions. In Part II, I will explore the normative issues at stake in the *relational dimension* of

labor justice, by exploring the resources that are provided by two different traditions for *relationally* rethinking labor justice beyond distribution: the critical theory of recognition, and relational egalitarianism.

PART II

Beyond Distribution: The Relational Dimension of Labor Justice

Most distributive models have proven to be weakly multidimensional, for they don't acknowledge the distinct normativity that applies to social relations and contributive patterns. Distributive views tend to focus on goods rather than relations; even when they consider issues of status, respect and recognition, they essentially see them as “by-products” of issues of allocating goods (Young 1990; Anderson 1999). When they don't simply defend the *personal preference* thesis, they tend to conceive of issues of work as satisfactorily dealt with by allocative strategies. This way, the relational aspects of work and its structures end up being overlooked, and workers are statically represented as “substances” pre-existing relations themselves (Young 1990). Distributive resources account for only one side of the story. They neglect other normatively relevant dimensions of work, such as how people are treated, how decisions are taken and control is exercised, as well as the quantitative and qualitative aspects of work and the division of labor. These aspects can be referred to, respectively, as the *relational*, *political*, and *contributive* dimensions of labor justice (see §Introduction). I have argued that pay and access to resources should be seen as an essential, and yet insufficient, strand of labor justice. For people do not work merely to get material compensations: they also seek symbolic rewards (Honneth 1996; Dejours 2007; Dubet 2013; Hodson 2001). Relational dynamics of social status, respect, and esteem are deeply embedded in organizational cultures, more so than distributive models may allow us to see (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Ridgeway 2014). The following chapters will argue that the quality of social relations is vital for labor justice. The first part of the thesis has asked whether a conception of *labor justice as distribution* is plausible. Part II takes one step further and explores what I have called the *relational dimension* of labor justice.

The category of “social relations” is perhaps too broad, involving many aspects that cannot be addressed here. Aspects that won't be considered, for instance, are the personal bonds between co-workers and their everyday ordinary interactions. Many studies have focused on this important issue. For instance, Cynthia Estlund has shown that good social interactions among colleagues in the workplace has an impact on democratic life (Estlund 2003). The importance that a sense of community may play in workers' well-being has been considered also by Herzog and Gheaus (2016). Without underestimating the relational relevance of labor-related belonging, I will confine my attention essentially to two normative issues:

- *Recognition.*
- *Social equality.*

They point to two qualitatively different, and yet deeply intertwined issues. Both fundamentally exceed the scope of distributive justice, and both are particularly relevant when it comes to work. They will be addressed by drawing on two distinct traditions: the critical theory of recognition (Chapter III) and relational egalitarianism (Chapter IV). Although these traditions tend not to speak to each other, and despite their relevant differences, they have many aspects in common that it is fruitful to consider together in order to grasp what escapes the gaze of distributive justice when it comes to work. They may offer alternative vocabularies of justice beyond the distributive lexicon. I will address the resources that they provide for

rethinking the social and relational aspects of labor justice, and draw some proposals from the discussion.

The Relational Side of Distribution

Although distributive theorists tend to offer limited accounts of social relations, distributive justice *does* have highly relevant implications for them. The way resources are allocated has implications on the quality of social relations, even if justice in social relations requires more than resource allocation (see Schemmel 2011; Scheffler 2015a). The distributive and relational dimensions should thus not be understood as completely independent. Indeed, distributive theorists do not *completely* overlook what I have called the relational dimension. In Chapter I, I discussed Rawls' primary good of the social bases of self-respect, which he refers to as "probably the most important" among the primary goods. Self-respect, however, is essentially conceptualized in "distributive" terms. That is, it is expected to result from goods and distributive patterns. It is assumed that, once certain distributive conditions of justice are met, self-respect follows. This way of conceptualizing respect is at risk of neglecting its non-distributive, qualitative, distinctively relational aspects. As Iris Marion Young has observed, the distributive perspective tends to represent the individual as a "substance" that pre-exists to the goods she receives (1990). The processual and relational character of self-respect, and its qualitative specificity, is thus not fully represented. Also, consider that there are cases in which self-respect does not have much to do with material resources. A person doing badly socially regarded work, with low prestige and suffering from stigmatization, would not get respect simply by being paid more. Self-respect, esteem, recognition, cannot be thought of as mere by-products of redistribution. Although they are deeply intertwined with redistribution (Satz 1996; Fraser 2003), they follow their own logic. This is one reason for the normative differentiation condition.

Concerning social esteem, John Rawls' insights seem more plausible. The Aristotelian principle stresses that seeing one's worth recognized by others is fundamental for gaining the self-confidence needed to pursue one's conception of the good. Besides this, Rawls clearly asserts that status inequality is one of the reasons for which inequality is inherently wrong (Rawls 2001; Scanlon 2000; 2018). Whereas self-respect is non-comparable, status is necessarily relative. I have shown that Rawls' considerations on status, however, are quite limited in scope. Status does not play a particularly significant role in his theory; it is explored only in a relatively small number of statements in the paragraphs on equality in *Justice as Fairness*. He also attempts to solve the problem of status inequality by means of citizenship. Citizenship, Rawls argues, provides recognition to people as having the same status. This legal-institutional notion of status is, however, too narrow. Despite its importance, the status of citizens does not eliminate status inequality as embedded in organizations and institutions, beyond its legal shape, as will be shown in Chapter IV.

Although he claims that status and political influence are part of socialist concerns, John Roemer essentially overlooks them in his theory of justice, largely restricting his gaze to the distributive side of equality. Roemer stresses that socialists want self-realization and welfare, status and political influence, but the tools that he ultimately provides us with are only of the distributive kind. Furthermore, his notion of exploitation neglects the overlap between material resources and social status. Overall, his approach fails to attribute any specific

relevance to the quality of social relations, *even* in distributive arguments. For instance, luck egalitarian's concerns for individual responsibility in determining the distributive outcomes have paternalistic implications that are likely to stigmatize those who lack what is needed to win the "competition". Since competition involves by definition winners and losers, those who end up on the lower rungs of the ladder – the "losers" – are likely to be stigmatized and given less value in the social scale. According to Elizabeth Anderson, luck egalitarians fundamentally disrespect the victims of bad option luck (see Anderson 1999, 295 ff.).

As for Michael Walzer, he provides interesting insights on the subject of honor and status, which he treats, indeed, as spheres of justice in their own right. He is well aware of the non-distributive character of recognition⁷³:

Wealth and commodities can always be redistributed, collected by the state and given out again in accordance with some abstract principle. But recognition is an infinitely more complex good. In some deep sense, it depends entirely upon individual acts of honoring and dishonoring, regarding and disregarding. (Walzer 1983, 255)

The normative differentiation condition is, however, not fully met by his account. Indeed, while he acknowledges the relative autonomy of the sphere of status, it is always under an overarching distributive framework that he develops these concerns. From this perspective, one cannot represent status but as "a good" among others to be allocated, which fundamentally misrepresents it. Moreover, note that this account of recognition as entirely depending on individual acts is partial: indeed, institutions play a significant role, as I will discuss in Chapter IV.

In the following chapters I explore, first, the resources that Axel Honneth's theory of recognition provide for rethinking work, and then discuss in what way Nancy Fraser's approach may help to overcome the limitations of both distributive views and Honneth's theory. Second, drawing on sociological research, I will address the ways in which status inequalities are embedded in the structures and organizations of work, highlighting related normative concerns with the help of relational egalitarian tools. In order to contextualize these views, before starting the discussion I will briefly outline the key aspects of these traditions that are not usually considered together.

The "Relational Turn" in Political Theory: Two Debates

The political-theoretical debates on recognition and relational equality came to the fore in the 90s, when the need to expand the tools of analysis beyond traditional economic categories was increasingly felt, in line with the rise of social movements campaigning for the parity of women, people of color, and gay people. Such pressing demands in the social world came hand in hand with evolutions in theoretical frameworks, which increasingly acknowledged the need for new categories and paradigms of justice. Sociological research became more sensitive to categories of gender and race rather than just class, giving birth to the intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1988). Intersectionality aimed at overcoming the narrowness of the category of

⁷³ "No simple equality of recognition is possible; the idea is a bad joke. (...) Relative standing will still depend upon the resources that individuals can marshal in the ongoing struggle for recognition. As we can't redistribute fame itself, so we can't redistribute those resources; for they are nothing but the personal qualities skills, and talents valued in a given time and place, with which particular men and women are able to command the admiration of their fellows" (Walzer 1983, 255-56)

class, and to provide richer and more complex accounts of the social geographies of inequality, as well as of the needs that seemed not to be met by redistributive policies.

It became increasingly clear that justice was not merely a matter of material resources. These movements wanted more: they aimed to be *recognized* as fully-fledged members of society. A sort of double movement between social movements and the academic and public sphere increasingly led to a conceptual shift from *distributive* to *relational* justice. Perhaps the idea of a “relational turn” may appear exaggerated. Nonetheless, the expression aims at highlighting that the relational branch has been an increasingly important idea to be reckoned with since the 90s.

This movement entered the political-philosophical debate essentially in three ways. First, through feminist theory and the intersectional approach. Second, through the category of recognition: an alternative paradigm of justice centered on the normative importance of the demands of people to be recognized by others. Third, through a relational conception of equality, conceived of as replacing the distributive conception. I will leave aside the intersectional approach and the specificity of the feminist perspective, not because they are not relevant, but because the categories of recognition and relational equality comprise them as concepts at a higher level of abstraction.

Thus, two different strands of the “relational turn” in political philosophy may be identified:

- the *critical theory of recognition* strand, and
- the *relational egalitarianism* strand.

They can be respectively characterized as “critical” and “analytical” because of some key methodological differences, which I will address later in detail. Preeminent critical theorists include Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young. Philosophers belonging to the analytical tradition include Elizabeth Anderson, Tim Scanlon, Johnathan Wolff and Samuel Scheffler. Despite the deep differences between these two groups, which perhaps tend not to talk to each other and focus instead on their “internal debates”, they share some relevant concerns and perspectives. A joint consideration of both traditions can be fruitful for a re-conceptualization of labor justice, taking us beyond the shortcomings of the distributive approach.

The publication of *The Struggle for Recognition* by Axel Honneth in 1992 marked a point of no return in the debate of justice⁷⁴. Critical theorists turned from issues of communication and democracy, as in the tradition inaugurated by Jürgen Habermas, to issues of social struggle and recognition. Critical theory thus introduced an alternative “moral grammar” (Honneth 1996) into the debate, in that it seemed to be able to reinterpret the changing demands of social movements, and provide the tools needed to express the increasing dissatisfaction with economic lexicon. The basic idea of Honneth’s proposal was that people do not care merely about redistribution of material resources; they demand recognition and social consideration.

A few years later, in 1996, the analytic philosopher Thomas Scanlon formulated his “objections to inequality”, identifying inequality of status as one reason for which inequality is inherently wrong (Scanlon 2000; 2018). While most theories were centered on distributive problems, as in the tradition begun by John Rawls and continued by Ronald Dworkin and the luck egalitarians, the notion of relational or *social equality* entered the debate and increasingly became an essential part of it. With very different methodologies, conventions and goals, these

⁷⁴ The concept of recognition was also raised in Charles Taylor’s discussions with respect to multiculturalism (Taylor 1994) as well as by Avishai Margalit (1996).

philosophers from distant traditions all gave voice to an increasing awareness of the shortcomings of the distributive paradigm, as first identified by Iris Marion Young in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).

Young could be considered as a sort of “joining link” between these two traditions. Although she identifies as a critical theorist (Young 1981), and her methods substantially reflect that approach (immanent, transformative, and interdisciplinary), she is also a key point of reference for analytical egalitarians. Consider Elizabeth Anderson’s groundbreaking article, “What is the Point of Equality?” (Anderson 1999), which marked the starting point of a new tradition in analytical political theory: relational egalitarianism. In that article, it is Iris Young that Anderson referred to when offering her relational critique of the distributive paradigm. To be sure, in 1998 Johnathan Wolff expressed similar concerns in his article “Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos”: “egalitarians should not only be motivated by a concern for fairness, but also by the idea of respect for all. (...) These two values, both of which are authentically part of the egalitarian ethos, can come into conflict” (Wolff 1998, 97). Scanlon, Wolff, and Anderson are the authors who most contributed to the development of this alternative conception of egalitarianism, followed by Samuel Scheffler and many others.

In the same years in which analytical political philosophers were developing tools to rethink equality in a relational sense, critical theorists were focusing on the paradigm of recognition formulated by Honneth. A famous exchange between Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser contributed to the crystallization of the debate around the poles of the paradigms of distribution and of recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003). This led critical theorists to a sort of internal division. Whereas in spite of their specificities, the analytical egalitarians tended to appear as a relatively united front, the critical theory strand has come to be internally articulated in two sub-strands: the *monist* strand, and the *pluralist* strand. The monist strand is represented by Axel Honneth and the generation of thinkers that followed. The pluralist strand is represented by Nancy Fraser and other feminist-materialist theorists.

Monism and pluralism have precise meanings here. As is well-known, Honneth, a monist, believes that behind economic claims there are more fundamental demands of a symbolic and moral nature, which have to do with people’s needs to be recognized by others. Recognition, thus, appears as the “first engine” of individual and social development – in the shape of love, rights, and esteem. Fraser, by contrast, believes that economic demands cannot be reduced to the symbolic dimension. Fraser does not dismiss distribution nor does she dismiss recognition; rather, she contests the idea that they are mutually exclusive, arguing in favor of a perspective that considers them together. In her view, distribution and recognition claims are co-essential, and should be seen as “perspectives” with which to address social reality. Both of them have a normative specificity, and their views are deeply intertwined. The category of class, for instance, cannot really be conceived of as merely economic-distributive (Sayer 2002; 2005; Bourdieu 2016 [1979]; Sennett and Cobb 1972). Likewise, race and gender are rooted both in status and in class (Fraser 2003).

These two sub-strands of critical theory have provided two different interpretations of what recognition is. The monist strand represented by Axel Honneth conceives of recognition as a psychological process necessary for a subject’s positive relation to their self, that is, for each person to develop a positive identity (Honneth 1996). The pluralist (and more precisely three-folded) strand represented by Nancy Fraser interprets recognition as a demand affecting people’s status as peers, in order to prevent identarian essentialism and the impossibility of

adjudicating between legitimate and illegitimate claims (Fraser 2003). I will turn back to this difference at the end of this chapter. Before addressing the central topic of this chapter, I will devote the first paragraph to introducing the debate between distributive and relational traditions, because in order to understand the sense of the relational dimension of labor justice, it is necessary to put these categories into a meaningful context.

Recognition Theory vs Relational Egalitarianism

Let us turn to the differences between the critical and analytical traditions with regards to the relational turn. To begin, it is generally overlooked that relational egalitarians share at least three common key features with theorists of recognition:

- they both denounce the *shortcomings of distributive justice*,
- they both argue for the normative relevance of the *quality of social relations*; and
- both of them interpret the goal of justice *substantively*, i.e. as not being merely a matter of formal duties and rights; in the case of recognition theory, the goal is positive identity formation and self-realization, as for relational egalitarianism, the goal is generally to promote an “egalitarian ethos” (Wolff 1998).

However, they argue for the quality of social relations in different ways. Recognition theorists are mostly interested in a specific matter: the role played by recognition in social relations and in one’s identity. Relational egalitarians, however, do not restrict their view to only one feature (such as recognition), but maintain a wide perspective on social relations without a specific focus. As for the criticisms against the distributive perspective, recognition theorists’ main complaint is that, contrary to what distributive scholars think, dynamics of social recognition are the very source of distributive struggles as well as of distributive inequalities. Their criticism relies upon recognition monism: they deny the normative independence of distribution, for distribution is understood to be a by-product of recognition. For relational egalitarians, the move against distributive theorists is one that concerns mostly the mode and goals of justice: social justice should not merely ensure that everyone gets their due, but rather “to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others” (Anderson 1999, 288-289)⁷⁵. In order to pursue this aim, justice should cast its gaze on social relations rather than, or in addition to goods, and assess distributive patterns from the standpoint of social equality (Scheffler 2015a)⁷⁶. Thus, whereas recognition theorists’ critique emphasizes *motivational* aspects, that held by relational egalitarians mostly turns around the very *goals* of justice. Aspects of both criticisms are present in both traditions, however, albeit with different emphasis.

The differences between these views may be summed up as follows:

⁷⁵ As for the “negative aim” of egalitarian justice, according to Elizabeth Anderson it is “not to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs, but to end oppression, which by definition is socially imposed” (Anderson 1999, 288). Clearly, the main targets of these criticisms are luck egalitarians.

⁷⁶ “The distributive view, it is said, represents equality as an excessively abstract or “arithmetic” value. It makes it seem as if the fundamental egalitarian concern is to secure conformity to a certain pattern of distribution for its own sake. It fails to recognize that the real motivation for egalitarianism, both historically and conceptually, lies in a commitment to a certain ideal of society, a conviction that the members of society should relate to one another on a footing of equality. Distributive equality matters, they claim, only because and insofar as it is necessary in order to achieve a society of equals.” (Scheffler 2015a, 22)

- i. Normative principle. Whereas the theory of recognition values most the norms of *self-realization* and *autonomy*, relational egalitarians are mostly interested in the norm of *equality*.
- ii. Social subject. Recognition theorists mostly focus on issues of individual and collective *identity*, whereas relational egalitarians focus their attention on issues of *status* within social hierarchies.
- iii. Relational aspects. The theory of recognition focuses on only one aspect of the quality of social relations, namely *recognition*, whereas relational egalitarians pay attention to *broader normative concerns* affecting the quality of social relations (Fourie 2015, 6). For example, John Baker considers “respect and recognition” to be only one dimension of social equality (Baker 2015, 65); for Elizabeth Anderson, esteem is only one of the dimensions of normatively relevant social hierarchies, along with social standing and authority (Anderson 2017).
- iv. Remedy. Whereas recognition theorists identify in *recognition* the resources for a normative response to various shapes of social injustice, relational egalitarians tend to hold that *democracy* is the response to social justice (Young 1990; Anderson 1999).
- v. Mode. The theory of recognition provides an *agonistic* and *dynamic* account of social reality: recognition is something to “struggle for”. Relational egalitarianism rather tends to provide a more *static* account of social reality – conflict is not particularly emphasized and plays no special role in the internal configuration of its concepts.
- vi. Disciplines. Theorists of recognition mostly rely upon *interdisciplinary* considerations, whereas relational egalitarians tend to elaborate more analytical, *theoretical* arguments. More precisely, the former tends to engage in a dialogue with a variety of disciplines like sociology, psychology and political science, whereas the latter develops an essentially philosophical discourse, following the argumentative patterns and formulas of the analytical tradition.
- vii. Methodology/1. Theorists of recognition tend to embrace a *teleological* approach: they ask questions of self-realization and the good life. Relational egalitarians, by contrast, tend to adopt a *deontological* stance. Nonetheless, they are both substantive, though in different ways. Note that some egalitarians stress the egalitarian ethos, whereas others tend to be closer to the Rawlsian liberal-egalitarian tradition.
- viii. Methodology/2. They ground their methodologies and theoretical goals on different traditions of political theory: the *critical theory of society*, and *analytical political philosophy*. Critical theorists of recognition have an *immanent* approach – they aim to be anchored in real social dynamics and conflicts, and are characterized by a transformative attitude, such that the theory is conceived of as embedded in the political and social world, and is interpreted as part of its processes of transformation. Put differently, critical theory considers the norm “as a constitutive feature of the social world, and not just as an ideal with no social reality” (Smith 2009, 47). Analytical egalitarians mostly tend to deal with the political and social world from an *ideal* perspective, and their emancipatory concerns do not primarily aim at being immanently grounded⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ However, this is not necessarily true. In the famous article by Elizabeth Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?” (1999), for instance, one criticism against distributive egalitarians concerns precisely their detachment from real struggles of existing political movements: “the agendas defined by much recent egalitarian theorizing are too narrowly focused on the distribution of divisible, privately appropriated goods, such as income and resources, or privately enjoyed goods, such as welfare. This neglects the much broader agendas of actual egalitarian political movements. For example, gay and lesbian people seek the

Although at some points they overlap, the differences between the two traditions outnumber what they have in common. It is not my intention to argue that they are closer or more similar than they actually are. However, there might be a bridging point between these two traditions which may turn out to be fruitful for labor justice, as I will explore later.

Having contextualized the theories of recognition and of relational equality within the wider debates on justice over the last three decades, I can now turn the focus to labor justice. In particular, in the following sections I will engage in a dialogue with both traditions, in order to assess whether or not they provide some tools for a conception of labor justice that are neglected by distributive models. My aim is to identify the normative elements that may have a bearing on what I call the relational dimension of labor justice. I will search for these normative elements in both traditions, respectively centered on *recognition* and on *social equality*. Both seem to be suited to the task of identifying what escapes the gaze of the distributive perspective, and thus may help highlight the relational dimensions of work.

Whereas Honneth's theory of recognition acknowledges the relevance of the normative problem of work, relational egalitarians are not primarily interested in issues of labor. Rather, in their tradition far more attention has been paid to *markets* (Néron 2015, 2-4). Authors like Debra Satz and Anne Phillips, for instance, have focused on the relational features of the market and on economic exchange (Satz 2010; Phillips 2008). It is particularly striking that labor has not so far played a significant role in relational egalitarian reflections. This is so despite that fact that relational egalitarians are distinctively normatively concerned with social hierarchies that motivate patterns of social subordination (Anderson 1999; 2017), and the division of labor is precisely one of the key places where social hierarchies are reproduced (Tilly 1998; Tomaskvoic-Devey). Nonetheless, there are some egalitarian reflections offered in this direction, and indeed one of the first authors to relaunch the problem of work in political theory earlier dominated by distributive arguments, is one to which the relational egalitarian tradition owes a lot: Iris Marion Young (Young 1990; 2006; Anderson 1999; 2017). These reflections may be explored and reconceptualized so as to provide useful resources to rethink social equality at work, thereby expanding the normative grammar at our disposal, both beyond the distributive perspective and the shortcomings of the theory of recognition. In Chapter IV I will attempt to use relational egalitarian resources to address this problem of social equality at work.

By contrast, critical theorists of recognition differ in the landscape of justice debates for they have devoted special attention to the problem of work. Their awareness of the neglect of work in social and political theory has no equivalent in distributive literature. They have denounced the "political invisibility of work" as well as its "theoretical denial" (Renault 2011) and its "neutralization" (Honneth 1982) for a number of years. According to Axel Honneth, the reason for its neglect is that capitalist globalizing forces appear increasingly overwhelming, so as that any attempt to change the structures of work is dismissed as utopian (Honneth 2010). By contrast, in his article "Work and Recognition: A Redefinition", Honneth observes that "never in the last two hundred years have there been so few efforts to defend an

freedom to appear in public as who they are, without shame or fear of violence, the right to get married and enjoy benefits of marriage, to adopt and retain custody of children. The disabled have drawn attention to the ways the configuration of public spaces has excluded and marginalized them, and campaigned against demeaning stereotypes that cast them as stupid, incompetent, and pathetic. Thus, with respect to both the targets of egalitarian concern and their agendas, recent egalitarian writing seems strangely detached from existing egalitarian political movements." (Anderson 1999, 288). The difference, thus, may concern the different levels of priority that immanence has in the two traditions.

emancipatory and humane notion of work as there are today” (Honneth 2010, 223). This hesitancy to engage with the project of improving work conditions reveals a kind of detachment between social and political theory and social reality, which is due, according to Honneth, to the feeling that any attempt to rethink work will be cast as “mere wish”. The result is that intellectuals “have turned their backs on the world of work”, focusing their attention “far from the realm of production” (Honneth 2010, 223). Yet, most people continue to attach their social identity to their occupation, and “unemployment remains a social stigma and is still regarded as a personal fault”, while “precarious employment is still felt to be incriminating” (Honneth 2010, 224). The silence of theory in this area should thus not be interpreted as a proof that there are no legitimate claims to be made regarding the reorganization of work, but rather is indicative of a detachment of theory from social reality. Emmanuel Renault’s assessment is that the ‘invisibility’ of work stems from the widespread assumption that political freedom should be restricted to the public sphere, from which work is often excluded, and also from the idea that work is not a matter of justice if we accept a negative conception of freedom (Renault 2011, 135-136). Both authors agree that the gap between theory and people’s lives is not satisfactory: people *do* have normative expectations and symbolically invest in work. Thus if the task of critical theory is to detect the immanent normativity of social practices, theorists can no longer neglect the issue. Their perspective on work gives priority to the subjective and inter-subjective dimension of work, and they stress the role of work in identity-formation (Sainsaulieu 1988; Lallement 2007). The question is often addressed in terms of individuals’ psychological health (Dejours 1993; Deranty 2009). Perspectives point out that in social struggles over work, what is at stake is not merely exploitation, but respect (Honneth 1996). Thus the irreducibility of work to the distributive sphere is highlighted, with theorists arguing that work involves essentially symbolic dimensions. The subject-centered perspective of recognition is broadened by Renault through the notion of “social suffering”, which he borrows from Bourdieu and Dejours (Renault 2017). This notion allows for a reconsideration of recognition as rooted in broader social dynamics of power, taking us beyond the level of the individual.

Chapter III

Labor Justice as Recognition

I have come to the conclusion that it is a fruitful thing to start study of any social phenomenon at the point of least prestige. For, since prestige is so much a matter of symbols, and even of pretensions – however well merited – there goes with prestige a tendency to preserve a front which hides the inside of things; a front of names, of indirection, of secrecy.

(Hughes 2017 [1958], 48-49)

The division of labor is more than a technical phenomenon; there are infinite social-psychological nuances in it.

(Hughes 2017 [1958], 73)

This chapter explores the resources that recognition theory may provide to address normative problems of work and the division of labor. I will highlight the peculiar way in which the most prominent critical theorists of recognition in both the monist and the pluralist strands – Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser respectively – deal with work in striking contrast to distributive theories of justice. That is, I will ask whether a conception of *labor justice as recognition* makes sense, as I did in Part I for the question of *labor justice as distribution*. In particular, I will identify the normative concepts of work that can be discerned in the writings of the preeminent critical theorist of recognition, Axel Honneth. I will identify four main normative concepts of work in his writings, which tend to coincide with different phases of Honneth's intellectual path. I will critically discuss these concepts, assessing what resources they may provide for a conception of labor justice. In the last part of the chapter, I will outline the potentialities of an alternative framework, advocated by Nancy Fraser, for rethinking labor justice beyond the shortcomings found in distributive views and Honneth's theory. This will lay the groundwork for an exploration of the resources that relational egalitarian debates may provide for our purposes (Chapter IV).

In this chapter it will be shown that the conceptual apparatus mobilized by the theory of recognition and the methodology of critical theory is, in some ways, more suited to detecting the critical-normative dimensions of work than distributive theories. The critical theory of recognition does not suffer the problems that I have identified of distributive models. It does not share the *private preference* thesis: it does not present work as a merely private issue, abstracted from social relations, as distributive theories conceive of it. Rather, since the very idea of recognition itself is internally intersubjective, this perspective is far more open to non-atomistic views. In order to be recognized, one has to be in relation with others, which is of great importance for the healthy development one's own subjectivity. Nonetheless, note that a concern for intersubjectivity does not necessarily translate into a perspective that takes social structures into account. These approaches also do not embrace the *derivative thesis*, at least not in the distributive sense. They certainly do not think that once distribution is fixed, labor justice follows. However, they could be considered to be derivative in terms of recognition, which they tend to see as the central demand at play in work's normative dynamics, to which all other demands are somewhat subordinated. Work is sometimes presented as an epiphenomenon of recognition, which risks underestimating its other dimensions. Finally, they reject the *external justice* thesis, given that their point of view on

work is “fully internal”. They certainly do not stop at the door of work as distributive models do, but explore the internal dynamics of recognition in the workplace.

From this perspective, the theory of recognition may appear far more equipped to provide resources for a conception of labor justice. Nonetheless, it will turn out that the theory of recognition too narrowly focuses on recognition as the sole normative dimension relevant for work. The theory tends to only see the recognition side of the story, thereby pointing to a derivative thesis opposite in kind to that held by distributive theories. The normative models of work that it provides do not address the most pressing problems that a conception of labor justice should consider. I will eventually draw the following conclusions. First, I will show that recognition theory provides an account of work not sufficiently attentive to the structures of work or to the economic side of labor justice. Second, its point of view seems to be “too internal”; being entirely focused on a subject’s self-dynamics of recognition at work, the perspective is at risk of neglecting the relatively autonomous role that structures and organizations play. Third, I will argue that it provides relatively few resources for a critical perspective on unjustly unequal divisions of labor, because it essentially lacks a norm of equality. Indeed, it shares with liberal accounts of meaningful work a primary concern for autonomy, self-realization and personal achievement, which are valued at the detriment to equality. In order to overcome these shortcomings, I will turn both to Nancy Fraser’s model and to the relational egalitarian debate, arguing that multidimensionality and equality provide more compelling tools to critically address unjustly unequal divisions of labor.

Thus, despite making some progress towards a conception of labor justice beyond distribution, the model of recognition does not provide sufficient resources for such a conception. I will identify some “barriers” that impede the critical theory of recognition from providing a satisfying conception of labor justice. They can be anticipated as follows:

- It tends to be weakly interested in equality, for it is mostly centered on ideals of autonomy and self-realization. This brings it closer to the liberal approach of theories of meaningful work (see Chapter V), weakening its critical potential towards unjustly unequal labor structures. Call this the *autonomy without equality* barrier.
- It conceives of normative problems of work essentially *as* problems of recognition. However, not all problems of labor injustice are problems of recognition. The approach thus impedes us from detecting the normative specificity of other claims (which may be economic, cultural, and so on). Call this the *one-dimensionality* barrier.
- Its concern for the psychic and identarian dimensions involved in the experience of work is not sufficiently accompanied by tools directed towards the structures of work. Call this the *structure-blindness* barrier.
- Its strongly perfectionist perspective of the central ethical role played by work in people’s lives makes it difficult to cope with alternative, legitimate ethical stances in a pluralist world, like refusing work as the center of self-realization. Call this the *paternalism* barrier.

In the following paragraphs, I will address each of these “barriers” in turn. Let us turn now to some common, typical elements of the monistic strand of the critical theory of recognition with respect to work:

- these authors value the *psychic connections* relating to work, and their concerns are mostly focused on the *subjective experience of work*;

- their perspective is mostly *perfectionist* in character, i.e. they are interested in work as a means for *self-realization*;
- they care about the potentialities for *social transformation* that the experience of work may provide; and
- their approach is one of *immanent criticism*, i.e. they ground their normative reflections on individuals' lived experiences of work rather than on ideal models.

From these briefly sketched elements, it is already clear that recognition theorists overload work with key normative meanings, especially of a psychological, ethical, and also indirectly political nature.

1. Axel Honneth: Four Normative Concepts of Work

The German philosopher Axel Honneth positively regards the subjective experience of work with its psychological and moral dimensions. His normative standpoint is not so much one of justice, but rather of positive identity-formation. From Honneth's perspective, the wrongs of work consist in preventing individuals from developing positive relations to the self; what should be prevented is moral injury to one's identity, rather than the violation of some norm of justice. His consideration of work has, however, changed over the years. In the last few years he has shifted his focus from the subjective experience of work to the socially integrative function of the division of labor.

In Honneth's writing over the last 40 years, various key concepts of work can be discerned, each shedding light on a different angle on the issue. In what follows, I propose to identify four main normative concepts of work in Honneth's intellectual path:

- *work as self-transformation*;
- *work as equal social dignity and autonomy*;
- *work as individual achievement*; and
- *work as social integration*.

Each provides a critical standard and a particular reading of what may be wrong with work. The labor-related harms to one's identity can be outlined as follows:

- *alienation*;
- *social-contributive inequality*;
- *lack of opportunities for social esteem*; and
- *social exclusion*.

The first concept above has its roots in the thought of Marx and Hegel thought. It considers work as an experience of self-transformation, both expressive and formative in character. Through work, one objectifies her capacities into the product of her labor, thereby re-appropriating it to the benefit of one's subjectivity. The whole process is thus one of identity formation and learning. This concept provides a critical resource against the *alienation* of labor, and was mostly developed by Honneth in the 80s. The second concept refers to unequal access to recognition and autonomy in the workplace, due to class-related occupational hierarchies. It was sketched out by Honneth in the early 80s and, while it is one of his less developed concepts, it deserves consideration because it offers some of the few egalitarian tools that Honneth provides in his theory when addressing work. I will argue that if properly elaborated, the concept could provide a fruitful critical standard against what I have called *contributive inequality*. The third concept is inspired by Hegel's and George Herbert Mead's

thoughts on social esteem for one's capacities. It conceives of work as an experience through which workers contribute to society through their unique talents, which are thereby recognized by others as deserving social esteem. The concept may be interpreted as providing a critical standard against the *lack of opportunities* for social esteem and individual achievement, and was mostly developed by Honneth in the 90s. The concept is very problematic and will be critically assessed in detail. Given the special problems that it entails, I will devote more attention to this model than to others. The fourth concept is inspired by Marx's idea of a social division of labor in which all members of society recognize each other as valuable contributors, as well as by Hegel's and Durkheim's thoughts on the integrative functions of the social division of labor. While its critical dimension is not always clear, the concept can be understood as providing a standard against forms of *social exclusion* from being able to contribute to the division of labor. It was mostly developed in the most recent phase of Honneth's reflections.

In the following paragraphs, each normative concept of work will be assessed in two ways: through theoretical arguments, and through a "contributive justice test". This time, after considering the problem of automation and gendered housework (as in Chapter II) the "test" will draw attention to the problem of the social division of dirty work, which offers crucial resources for testing conceptions of labor justice, particularly with respect to recognition and occupational prestige. Finally, I will assess whether each of these normative concepts of work fits with a satisfactory account of the conditions for labor justice. My conclusion will be that Honneth should have developed his early intuitions on egalitarian recognition in order to maintain a critical stance on current labor structures, and that recognition monism is not tenable, especially when it comes to labor justice. Without a satisfying conception of equality and a genuinely pluralistic account of justice, the self-transformation, achievement and social integration models of work provide weak resources for criticizing unequal forms of the division of labor.

1.2. *The Externalization Model: Work as Self-Transformation*

The first normative concept of work that can be discerned in Honneth's intellectual path is the idea of *work as self-transformation*, or more precisely, work as expressive and formative self-transformation. This concept is especially present in the articles "Work and Instrumental Action" (1982 [1980]) and "Domination and Moral Struggle" (1991 [1989]), both of which can be traced back to the 80s.

In the article "Work and Instrumental Action" (1982a) Honneth finds in Marx's original formulations a key to an emancipatory understanding of work, against the prevailing instrumentalist readings of work offered by philosophers like Hannah Arendt, Max Scheler, and Jürgen Habermas⁷⁸. According to Honneth, they have "neutralized" the critical core present in the early Marxian concept of work, without replacing it in a satisfying way. Such neutralization is attributed to the tendency to "overemphasize" the instrumental and purely functional aspects of work (Honneth 1982, 38; Deranty 2009, 106 ff). He thus turns back to Marx, identifying in his early writings resources for a non-reductionist conception of labor,

⁷⁸ "In the categorical structure of this theory, work merely designates the action substrate – the development of social forces of production – from which the processes of communicative liberation are then normatively distinguished" (Honneth 1982, 49-50).

characterized both by expressive and formative traits. Locating the emancipatory core of work is the aim of Honneth's "critical conception of work" at this stage. This conception should provide a "standard of correctness", that is, "a resource for distinguishing between what is 'good' and 'bad' by way of work, and this just on account of it being work" (Smith 2009, 47). In line with the tradition of critical theory, this standard should be rooted in social reality, not in the ideal.

In Marx's early writings, the concept of work functions as a joining link between the critique of political economy and the idea of emancipation (Honneth 1982, 32)⁷⁹. Thanks to the incorporation of Hegelian motives, Marx expanded the economic concept of labor so as to include the subjective dimension of work as a learning process (*Bildung*). More precisely, according to Honneth, the Hegelian interpretation of work as a constitutive aspect of self-consciousness was incorporated by Marx so as to retranslate the "political-economic conception of labor into the consciousness-oriented theoretical language" (Honneth 1982, 32). This is what Honneth calls the "externalization model", consisting of the subject-object dynamics through which workers' capacities are objectified into the product of labor. Marx's representation of work as self-actualization of one's capacities and as the key to subjective self-development allowed him to criticize the capitalist organization of work "as a socially alienating relationship", in that it separates the worker from the objectifying character of the process thereby impeding one's self-actualization (Honneth 1982, 33). Honneth thus believes that Marx's original conception of work can provide a critical standpoint from which to address forms of socio-economic organization that impede workers from identifying in their own products (Honneth 1982, 34). Note that this is a typical account of "alienation", against which the externalization model is supposed to stand as a contrast.

Various elements make up and are characteristic of Honneth's approach to work at this stage. These include, first, the need to prove that work has a *normative dimension*, in contrast to the prevailing instrumentalist readings given by other authors (especially Habermas). Second, his critical conception of work distinctively aims at retrieving the Marxian idea of *work as Bildung* significant to identity-formation, thereby enabling him to criticize alienating working conditions. Third, this criticism =is *immanently justified* by the practices that workers themselves perform in the workplace, when attempting to re-gain autonomous control over the working process. In fact, the "critical conception of work" is intended to grasp the potentialities to transform work from the current way it is practiced, based on the "practical rationality" that workers put in place in order to contrast their alienation from the working process (Deranty 2009, 106 ff.; see also Smith 2009).

It is in the later article "Domination and Class Struggle" (1989) that the theoretical premises of this earlier article are developed to conceive of recognition as a possible alternative paradigm to that of labor. This idea is elaborated, once again, in close dialogue with Marx. According to Honneth, it is precisely in the concept of labor that his legacy is to be found today. Concepts like "alienation" and "reification" have not found valuable substitutes in contemporary social theory, Honneth argues, and in this way we are deprived of tools to critically address social and economic structures. Therefore, Honneth goes back to the moral premises of Marx's concept of labor, which lie in need of the concept of recognition.

⁷⁹ "Marx wishes to understand work not only from the standpoint of economic growth, but also from the normative position of practical, emancipatory self-development (*Bildung*)" (Honneth 1982, 32).

Honneth's main thesis here is that social struggle, in Marx, is not merely grounded in distributive conflicts, but also in morally oriented objections to alienating relations that harm self-respect. If in order to gain a positive identity one needs the experience of work, then one must look at the demand for recognition underlying the concept of labor:

A person's "dignity" or "respect," terms Marx did not hesitate to utilize at various points in his work, presuppose that through autonomous labour he or she can give visual form to his or her own abilities. (...) Marx does not conceive of the class struggle merely as a strategic conflict over the acquisition of goods or powers of command; rather, it represents a kind of moral conflict in which an oppressed class is fighting to achieve the social conditions for its self respect. Marx does not, therefore, view the unequal distribution of goods and burdens as such to be the underlying cause that triggers off the class struggle; rather, unequal distribution only provides such a cause insofar as it results in a one-sided destruction of the conditions for social identity. The philosophical-historical interpretation (...) thus incorporates a perspective that derives not from the logic of labour but from the logic of recognition (Sorel/Gramsci): under the economic conditions of capitalism the process of mutual recognition among human beings is interrupted because one social group is deprived of precisely those preconditions necessary to obtain respect. (Honneth 1995 (1989), 12-13)

Now Honneth realizes that the externalization model defended earlier is too romanticized and anachronistic. The model of the fully self-determined artisan can no longer fit contemporary capitalism. Therefore, we must turn to something else: namely, to the demand of self-respect lying behind the normative tensions that affect workers in the workplace. The paradigm of recognition should thus replace the paradigm of labor. At this stage, Honneth's interest for work underlies and increasingly reveals a deeper interest in recognition.

Honneth thus believes that a "paradigm of recognition" should replace the "paradigm of labour", in that it could work as a bridge between a theory of emancipation and an analysis of society. In 1989, the idea is further elaborated in deep connection with the categories of work and class. The struggle for self-respect is considered to be "the driving force" (Honneth 1995 (1989), 14) and "the motivational raw material" behind social conflicts. This requires that we identify the social conditions that harm self-respect. Under these changed social and theoretical conditions (once those of labor have been discarded), recognition is the most suitable candidate for normativity. Through the critical analysis of Marx's concept of labor, Honneth can thus lay the groundwork for his theory of recognition.

1.2.1. *Contributive Justice Test*

Let us thus assess how this model could help us address the problem of the unequal social division of dirty work. As observed earlier, it is a specific trait of the self-transformation model that workers are required to identify themselves in the product of their labor. Consider, then, cleaning or waste collecting. One may well ask, on Honneth's terms, whether or not a waste collector identifies themselves in the "product" of their work. Part of the problem here is that there is no clear "product" of this occupation, and thus it is not clear *what* one can identify themselves in. But even if we could identify such an object, still we would not be dealing with the real issue at stake.

Consider both sides of the self-transformative experience: formation and expression. Dirty work is one of the lowest skilled activities, one that typically does not require particular training. The formative side of this occupation thus looks poor. As for the expressive side, dirty workers struggle to express initiative and creativity in their labor (Roca 2010).

Therefore, if we were to apply Honneth's model here, one may conclude that since the normative model of self-transformation does not fit the case of dirty work, dirty work should thus be rejected as an inherently alienating form of work. Let us consider this assessment in a more practical way.

Honneth's model at this stage would require that dirty work either be eliminated, because it cannot be a self-transformative experience, or made more formatively and expressively engaging. This could be achieved by pursuing a series of strategies identified by the social actors themselves. But still, this would not address the problem of the social division of dirty work. The self-transformation model would give us tools to question the existence itself of dirty work, but in our real world, one can hardly demand that certain socially necessary tasks be simply eliminated because they are alienating. Social needs are inescapable. Cleaning is not an object of choice: someone has to do it. Once again, we face the difficulties of the SGP. Therefore, a more viable question may be, rather, how do we more fairly share dirty across society, and thus – so to speak – better distribute the burdens of alienation? But note that this question would require that we broaden our perspective beyond the mere subjective experience of work, towards its social division and organization. This can be seen from the fact that dirty work is an activity reserved for the least advantaged. From the perspective of the self-transformation model, one may say that the least advantaged are prevented from living work experiences that allow them to train and express themselves. In other words, the most alienating activities are reserved for the least advantaged, while the most advantaged enjoy a monopoly on self-transformation. This means that self-transformation alone cannot suffice: a norm of equality is needed. Given that dirty work cannot be eliminated, the self-transformation model should answer the question of who should perform it, *despite* or *a fortiori* given its low self-transformative potential. As Honneth himself correctly acknowledges later (2010), this model provides a romanticized and anachronistic model of work. I'd add that it does not address the contributive problem of unequal social division of labor, and more generally the most pressing questions of labor justice.

That the critique of alienation is anachronistic is a view contested by Emmanuel Renault (2006; see also Dejours 2012). Renault does not consider merely the "object" of one's labor; he provides a more extensive interpretation of alienation where the individual is a "stranger" to the world and to herself. In this framework, alienation is a "kind of relationship to the self and to the world resulting from the encounter with a social environment essentially unsatisfying, either unbearable, that makes the world appear as extraneous and that makes us strangers to ourselves"⁸⁰ (Renault 2006, 97). From this perspective, if one considers the specific expectations of post-Fordist workers, one may see that their subjectivities are fully involved in the pressure of performance beyond what they do, involving also what they *are* (Renault 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). While providing valuable insights on the subjective experience of work, which is certainly relevant to labor justice, the exploration of such intrapsychic dynamics of work does not provide us with many tools to help us answer our contributive question.

This concept of work does not fit the interdependence condition in that the normative perspective is limited to the subjective psychological experience of work, thereby abstracting

⁸⁰ "(...) le type de rapport à soi et au monde qui résulte de la rencontre d'un environnement social foncièrement insatisfaisant, voire insupportable, rencontre qui, conjointement, nous fait apparaître ce monde comme étranger et nous rend étranger à nous-même" (my translation).

from the structures of work and the division of labor. In addition, the concept does not meet the pragmatic pluralism condition because it relies on an ethically loaded idea of work as an existential experience of self-realization where the subject must be transformed by the experience of work, which thus plays an irreplaceable role in one’s identity formation. This metaphysics of the subjective experience of work is at odds with pragmatic pluralism – and it is not necessary for labor justice. As for multidimensionality, this model overlooks concerns of economic fairness, relational equality and democratic participation. Some attention is given to the contributive dimension, but is still confined to the quality of tasks from the perspective of identity-formation. This conception of work is thus not satisfying, not only for the reasons later identified by Honneth himself, namely the fact that the “craftmanship ideal” can no longer fit contemporary normative needs of work (see Honneth 2010), but also because it is not sensitive to other key normative conditions for labor justice, as illustrated below:

Work and Recognition	Normative Differentiation /Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Internal Justice
Externalization Model: Work as Self-Transformation	/	/	/	x (subjective)

1.3. *Unequal Social Dignity and Autonomy in the Workplace*

In the article “Moral Consciousness and Class Domination” (1982b), Honneth pursues the project of addressing the normative core of work by investigating workers’ practice of implicit resistance in the workplace to regain access to deprived social dignity. The elements present in the earlier articles, such as the oppositions between the normative and instrumental readings of work, as well as between self-transformation and alienation, are now developed within the broader problematic of class domination. Whereas in “Work and Instrumental Action” (1982a), the concept of recognition and its corresponding semantic field were left rather undeveloped, in this article the normative substratum of recognition begins to emerge, and distinctively so⁸¹. Honneth’s thesis is that there are forms of normativity that do not meet the requirements of explicit articulation and argumentation, and which nevertheless cannot be dismissed as lower forms of morality. This is particularly true in the workplace, where forms of moral conflict occur which lie under the threshold for articulated expression⁸². Criticizing the idea that explicit discourse encompasses the realm of normativity (as was supposed by Habermas) plays a key role in Honneth’s distancing himself from instrumentalist views of work. He argues that it is in the nature of Habermas’ theory that he systematically neglects the problems lying under the surface of explicit articulation (Honneth 1982b, 207). The concept of “consciousness of injustice” taken from Barrington Moore (1978) is crucial

⁸¹ On this point see Piroballi 2011.
⁸² “Potentialities for moral action which may not have reached the level of elaborated value judgements, but which are nonetheless persistently embodied in culturally coded acts of collective protests” cannot be grasped by any approach that sees in linguistic exchange the exclusive *locus* of morality.

here, for it provides a moral vocabulary that points to the substratum of normative demands lying under explicit expression⁸³.

What interests me most in this article are two aspects:

- first, Honneth's intuitions on the insufficiency of the distributive approach when it comes to the normative expectations of the workers; and
- second, his conceptualization of a rough idea of social equality at work.

Importantly, here he begins to elaborate the conceptual premises of what he will later develop as a theory of recognition. The notions of "immaterial deprivation", "immaterial goods", "unequal distribution of social dignity" and "asymmetrical distribution of cultural and psychological life chances", comprise at this stage the semantic field of Honneth's embryonic conception of recognition. Beyond any conceptually limited understanding of social classes as social groups whose needs can be met by material goods, one should not restrict the reading of social conflicts to merely distributive disputes over "quantifiable compensations" (Honneth 1982b, 216). Indeed, there are "experiences of deprivation" that cannot be simply fulfilled by individual distributions of divisible goods (Honneth 1982b, 216)⁸⁴. Even the sociological concept of "life chances" should not be reduced to a merely quantified, economic understanding, but should be extended so as to include "sociocultural" and psychological resources⁸⁵. Honneth grounds these intuitions on the groundbreaking work of Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972). This ethnographic study provides him with key tools to develop his intuitions on the hidden character of the moral injuries withstood by the lower classes at work. Workers' practice of implicit resistance to the rhythm of work could be interpreted as a manifestation of their attempt to regain autonomous control over the working process, thus implicitly pointing to a counterfactual idea of self-directed work. It is not without significance that intuitions on the failures of the distributive perspective, which constitute the very premises of the theory of recognition, are developed in the specific context of work, given that work is a context especially suited to exhibiting crucial normative dynamics of recognition.

Besides this initial articulation of what is unaccounted for by the distributive discourse, this article is interesting also because it provides a conceptualization of labor injustice as inequality in recognition and freedom. The focus is no longer merely on the psychical experience of work as self-transformation, as in the externalization model. Now concerns for workers' subjectivities are highlighted in the context of class inequalities in essentially two ways.

⁸³ "(...) the social ethic of the lower strata represents an uncoordinated complex of reactive demands for justice. Thus, while elaborated ideas of justice undertake to provide active evaluations of social situations within a relatively coherent system of relations, the unwritten social morality consists of situationally bound condemnations of these social facts. Since these negative valuations are not generalized into a positive system of principles of justice, I would like to suggest, in agreement with Barrington Moore, the term "consciousness of injustice" as a name for their cognitive substrate. This conception is intended to bring out the idea that the social ethic of the suppressed masses contains no ideas of a total moral order or projections of a just society abstracted from particular situations, but is instead a highly sensitive sensor for injuries to intuitively recognized moral claims." (Honneth 1982b, 209)

⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that Honneth seems to believe that distributing money and free time has a specific connection to capitalism. He thus implicitly seems to assume that recognition traces back to a noncapitalist logic. However, this is not the case. Studies on the "reputational economy" have shown that capitalist economies do use recognition as a means for compensation. His later writings take into account the possibility of recognition counting as a factor of production (2010).

⁸⁵ "(...) a theory of classes designed to describe capitalism cannot be limited to the unequal distribution of material goods, but must be extended to the asymmetrical distribution of cultural and psychological life chances. I mean here a maldistribution of opportunities for cultural education, social honor, and identity-guaranteeing work, which is surely difficult to measure, but nonetheless empirically verifiable. When we include in the perspective of critical social theory this dimension of the structurally unequal distribution of immaterial goods (...), zones of normative conflict become visible which have unobtrusively penetrated daily life, and which are based on class-specific feelings of injustice." (Honneth 1982b, 217)

1. First, the class division of society produces “different occupational positions” while it individualizes success through a system of evaluation focused on individuals’ achievements (i.e. through education). This results in “a lasting inequality in the distribution of chances for social recognition” (Honneth 1982b, 218). Given such strongly individualized ascriptions of respect and intelligence, “lower, primarily manually employed occupational groups” see their possibilities of self-respect “drastically restricted” (Honneth 1982b, 218). To these impediments to gaining recognition, workers respond through a “counterculture of compensatory respect” aimed at regaining the deprived cognitive resources (Cobb and Sennett 1972). Such responses to the “daily experiences of injustice” are confined to pre-political expressions (i.e. limited to specific groups or even to solipsistic thought) because of the lack of a social movement supporting and canalizing them towards articulated political expression. The aim of these “uncoordinated attempts to gain, or regain, social honor” is “either to symbolically raise the status of one’s own work activity or to symbolically lower the status of the socially higher-placed form of work” (Honneth 1982b, 218).

2. Second, class society “codetermines to a great extent the degree of freedom and control of individual work activities” (Honneth 1982b, 219). That is, the members of the lower classes “who hold the lowest ranks in the factory or office hierarchy of dominance, are forced into monotonous work activities which offer little or no opportunity for individual initiative” (Honneth 1982b, 219). This is connected to the Taylorization of labor, which has led to a detachment between work and the technical knowledge of workers, to an increase in the division between conception and execution, and to detailed control of the productive process (Honneth 1982b, 219). Once again, what interests Honneth the most is the response of workers, for there one can discern a normative, counterfactual idea of work, which can provide a standard to criticize the current organization of labor beyond instrumentalist readings:

The workers reply to the experience of the systematic expropriation of their work activity with a system of daily violations of norms and rules in which they attempt to retain at least informal control of the entire production process. The production policy of capitalist industrial enterprises is thus accompanied by a counteracting process in which the workers attempt to apply their situationally superior knowledge as an informal means of practical self-defense. I interpret these labor struggles, which lie below the threshold of publicly recognized normative conflict, as indicators of a consciousness of injustice which implicitly lays claim to the right to the autonomous organization of work. (Honneth 1982b, 218-219)

Thus, it is in the workplace that autonomy and recognition find a privileged stage for expression, tension and even oppression. On this reading, autonomy and recognition are impeded by class-structured occupational hierarchies, which reserve for the lower strata few chances for recognition and freedom in the workplace. These two sides of inequality provide an interesting critical standpoint against contributive inequalities. Two normative concepts of work emerge here: work as a means to social recognition, and work as an experience of autonomy⁸⁶.

I propose to unpack these intuitions as referring to two key facets of the idea of unjust contributive inequality, which may be referred to as:

- 1) *labor injustice as unequal chances for recognition*, and
- 2) *labor injustice as unequal autonomy*.

⁸⁶ Note that I am using the terms “autonomy”, “freedom” and “self-direction” interchangeably here, as Honneth does.

The first facet of Honneth's reading of contributive inequality stresses unequal *recognition* in labor structures. This is because the class-structure of society allows for an unequal distribution of chances for social dignity, which produces unarticulated moral tensions and compensatory strategies for respect. The second facet points to unequal *autonomy* in the workplace. This is because the class-structure of society structuring the division of labor impedes equal access to meaningful and self-directed work to the lower strata. Those who suffer the most from such contributive inequalities, as I have called them, are the lower occupational groups. Importantly, we thus find in Honneth's early formulations a normatively informed idea of *contributive inequality*, which he interprets in terms of unequal access to freedom and recognition at work. It is in workers' "daily violations of norms" that the substratum for criticism and potential to change contributive inequality is found.

Therefore, in contrast to his article "Work and Instrumental Action" (1982a), Honneth does not confine his normative attention here to the intra-psychic dynamics of the subjective experience of work. Rather, he contextualizes these experiences within the broader occupational outcomes of class inequalities. This article, thus, marks an important step forward from "Work and Instrumental Action" (1982a). There, the focus was on the harm to workers' chances of living their work as a learning and expressive process – i.e. alienation. In "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination" (1982b), the accent shifts towards class-related unequal recognition at work and to self-directed work. *Inequality* enters into the normative discussion of work in that there is a focus on the normative effects of the experiences of different occupational groups. The counterfactual idea that may be drawn from these insights, even if it is not fully conceptualized by Honneth, is one of *equal social dignity and autonomy at work*.

However, these intuitions were not developed further by Honneth in his later writings. He subsequently abandoned this focus on class inequalities and occupational hierarchies, and turned his attention to the demands of recognition of 'universal subjects' and groups (for a reconstruction see Piromalli 2011; 2012). Honneth ends up realizing that the demand for recognition is transversal across social groups, and thus a universal phenomenon:

(...) the proletarian struggle for respect for claims to honor was by no means a special case, but only a particularly striking example of a widespread experiential pattern: subjects perceive institutional procedures as social injustice when they see aspects of their personality being disrespected which they believe have a right to recognition. (Honneth 2003, 132)

This makes him lose sight of contributive inequalities as well as of the economic structures behind them⁸⁷.

Honneth's intuitions come at the cost of essentialism. Ascribing to the lower classes a specific morality *by virtue* of their position in the social hierarchy is at risk of fixing workers

⁸⁷ Jean-Philippe Deranty has observed that there is a sort of "repressed materiality" between the earlier writings and the more "disincarnated" later developments of the theory of recognition. In Deranty's words, "the passage from the production, to the communication, to the recognition paradigm, seems to coincide with a gradual dematerialisation of the meaning of interaction" (Deranty 2006, 127 ff.). "In its mature shape, however, recognition theory operates on a narrow concept of interaction, which seems to lose sight of the material mediations with which intersubjective relations are imbricated." (Deranty 2006, 113). However, note that Deranty's idea of materiality is different from the one I am referring to here. By "materiality" he means material objects and tools involved in the labor process (whose normative significance has been highlighted by Christophe Dejours), whereas I am referring to the distributive-economic dimension of labor justice. Likewise, Deranty warns on the "reduced interaction to horizontal inter-subjectivity, and to underplay the structural importance of other, 'vertical' relationships", but by verticality he means the relationship "between human and nonhuman beings, interactions of the individual with personal objects, with tools, machines, the resistance of matter, society's 'metabolism' with its environment, and so on" (Deranty 2006, 127), *not* contributive inequality.

into predefined categories of moral attitudes and properties inferred from their social positions⁸⁸. But class-essentialism cannot be accepted for the same reasons as gender and race essentialism. Class-specific morality, moreover, entails problems of universality, even though such unarticulated claims “may have the potential of becoming justice claims capable of universalization, since they indirectly illuminate socially established asymmetries” (Honneth 1982b, 218). Essentialism and particularism constitute serious limitations to Honneth’s account at this stage. However, over the following years Honneth has progressively left aside such class-specific views, turning towards a universal perspective of recognition, where classes are replaced by ‘identities’ and ‘collectivities’⁸⁹. But this does not mean that the problem of essentialism is fully avoided, even once class-specificity is no longer there, as Nancy Fraser has observed (Fraser 2003).

Despite the significant changes in the class structures of contemporary societies (Savage 2014; Standing 2011; 2014; Chauvel 2001; 2006; 2001; Wright 1999) and the limitations of Honneth’s account at this stage (Guibet Lafaye 2012), some of Honneth’s intuitions seem to be confirmed by recent sociological research. Consider, for instance, the work of A. Lütke on the concept of *Eigensinn* (Lütke 1996) and the studies on daily micro-acts of resistance to the rhythms of labor that workers perform by ‘disengaging’ themselves from the working process (Renahy 2015). French sociology has provided illuminating accounts of the “*coulisses du travail*” (“the backstage of work”) and the “not-work at work”, as implicit and tacit attempts by workers to regain autonomy in the workplace (Bozon and Lemel 1989; Pruvost 2011). All of these documented examples can be considered as attempts to regain subjective spaces of self-direction within the constraints of the labor process. Note that they are often documented as lying under the level of explicit expression, as in Honneth’s hypothesis grounded on Sennett and Cobb’s work.

To conclude, I have so far discerned two normative concepts of work in Honneth’s early writings: the concept of *work as self-transformation* which points to the *subjective experience of work* (Honneth 1982a; 1989), and the concept of *unequal social dignity and autonomy in the workplace* which points to what I have called *contributive inequalities* (Honneth 1982b). Some theoretical shifts and oscillations can be identified. Whereas in the self-transformative model what is wrong is that the worker cannot identify herself in the product of her labor, in the inequality model what is wrong is unequal recognition and autonomy. Whereas in the first article (1982a) Honneth is interested in locating a normative concept of work against the instrumentalist drift of political and social theory for a “critical conception of work”, in the last article (1989) he declares that project to be no longer feasible because of the changed working conditions in the Taylorization of labor. The paradigm of labor, thus, should leave room for the paradigm of recognition.

Despite his initial intuitions on contributive inequality, Honneth’s reflections have not led him to the further development of an egalitarian account. Recognition is later developed as a fully-fledged paradigm, and interest in labor inequalities progressively diminishes.

⁸⁸ For an empirically informed critique of this perspective see C. Guibet Lafaye, “Domination sociale et représentations du juste. Mise à l’épreuve d’une thèse d’Axel Honneth” *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 50(2), 2012 : 147 : 174. Note that Honneth himself, in his article, specifies that his intuitions are yet to be empirically demonstrated (Honneth 1982b, 217).

⁸⁹ I have suggested this point in the article “Classi e identità. Declinazioni dell’emancipazione”, in S. Mariani, F. Pitillo (eds.), *Emancipazione. Problemi e prospettive*, Quaderni della Scuola di Roma – Stamen, Rome 2017 (“Emancipazione senza classi, classi senza emancipazione: Axel Honneth e Pierre Bourdieu”).

1.3.1. *Contributive Justice Test*

This model may address the unequal division of dirty work as raising a normative problem of unequal social dignity and autonomy. Indeed, dirty workers are mostly from the lower classes, and thus hold the lowest ranks in the occupational hierarchy, characterized by low social dignity and close supervision. This normative concept of work, thus, may be well suited to the case of dirty work. Normatively, it may be interpreted as requiring that one’s social class does not determine one’s position in the labor hierarchy, *and* that one’s position in the labor hierarchy not be related to poor levels of social recognition and autonomy.

Despite this, the concept of work is not really developed by Honneth beyond the article “Moral Consciousness and Class Domination” (1982), which presents interesting elements that could be developed for a counterfactual idea of equality at work. This normative concept of work is not restricted to the subjective experience of work as in the self-transformation model, but also takes into account class inequalities and occupational hierarchies, and thus satisfies the social interdependence condition. Furthermore, compared to the self-transformation model, it does not entail an ethically loaded or demanding concept of recognition and autonomy, and therefore it may potentially satisfy the pragmatic pluralism condition. With regards to multidimensionality, the dimensions considered are the relational and the contributive, and in one sense also the distributive (presented as not sufficient to meet all of workers’ normative demands). At this stage, Honneth connects the economic-distributive dimension with the relational-social dimension of labor justice. That is, Honneth’s early idea of recognition is linked to the economic structure of class divisions and occupational groups, without reducing such class divisions and occupational groups to mere economic differences. Honneth’s idea is that daily, pre-political micro-struggles in the workplace express a “consciousness of injustice” (Moore) which cannot be fully dealt with in redistributive terms, because what underlies them are symbolic and moral demands of social dignity that cannot be simply be “allocated” as material goods are. These intuitions seem to meet the normative differentiation condition and the interdependence condition. They do not reduce work to income, and do not confine their gaze to the subjective experience of work, but locate labor justice within the broader framework of contributive inequality. While acknowledging that the distributive logic is not by itself sufficient to deal with social injustice, at this stage Honneth can still connect precognitive claims with a materialistic basis. Furthermore, by pointing to contributive inequalities, a counterfactual normative idea of equality can be discerned. It is indirectly present also in the political dimension when it comes to autonomy and control of workers. Therefore, if adequately developed, this normative concept of work may have the potential to provide a satisfying account of labor justice. Such potential, however, is lost when Honneth shifts from this embryonic egalitarian attempt to critically address contributive inequalities (1982) to the achievement principle (1992), which I will address in the following paragraph.

Work and Recognition	Normative Differentiation /Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Internal Justice
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Equal Recognition and Autonomy at Work	Partially met	x	x	x (Social and subjective)
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1.4. *Work as Personal Achievement: The “Leistungsprinzip”*

In *Struggle for Recognition* (1996), Honneth first develops a systematic theory of recognition. In his earlier writings, the ideas of social dignity, self-respect, immaterial goods and life chances constitute the premises of his theory of recognition. To recall, these early reflections led to the conclusion that the “paradigm of labor” was no longer tenable, and had to be replaced by the “paradigm of recognition” (Honneth 1989). The initial project of a “critical conception of work” (Honneth 1982a) was thus abandoned, in order to pursue a theory of recognition capable of accounting for the unmet normative demands of respect, earlier identified as the substratum of moral struggles at work. The centrality of work thus seems to be questioned by Honneth. As he acknowledges in the preface to *The Fragmented World of the Social* (1995), the arguments earlier elaborated in “Work and Instrumental Action” are in need of revision (Honneth 1995, xviii). In the decade that followed between that article and *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth had come to think that the normative consideration of work “cannot be related to the internal character of work itself, but rather only to the institutional framework in which it is necessarily embedded” (Honneth 1995, xvii). He thus turns his attention from the inherent features of the subjective experience of work, to the social conditions necessary for esteem (see also Smith 2009). We no longer find any reference to contributive inequality nor to self-transformation as we did in the externalization model. In the 90s, work is mostly seen by Honneth as one of the mediators of social esteem; it apparently plays no special role in the architecture of the theory of recognition. It is the concept of *work as individual achievement* (Leistungsprinzip) that takes a prominent position in Honneth’s thought at this stage. Clearly, between the critical conception of work offered in the earlier years and the principle of achievement one can find a wide gap. The stress is no longer on the hidden morality of working practices, but rather on work as a means to gaining recognition from others for one’s unique talents and skills. The perspective becomes more individualistic. All reference to the working class disappears: the subject of recognition can no longer be identified as applying to a distinctive or particular social group (and in this way, Honneth also escapes the risk of essentialism).

The basic idea of the theory of recognition proposed in 1992 is that, in order to develop a positive relation to the self and to construct a positive identity, subjects need to see themselves as recognized by others. The intersubjective roots of identity formation take different shapes, strongly affected by different societal contexts, to which specific modes of recognition correspond. The family, civil society, and the community (Hegel’s three moral spheres) are respectively associated with the modes of recognition of love, rights, and esteem. These, in turn, correspond to specific modes of self-relation: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. It is the third sphere of recognition, esteem, that presents many interesting elements for our purposes, because it concerns people’s interests in being valued by others for their individual, unique contributions to society:

(...) in order to be able to acquire an undistorted relation-to-self, human subjects always need – over and above the experience of affectionate care and legal recognition – a form of social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities. (Honneth 1996, 121)

This idea of recognition for one's individual contributions to society is in tension with the second sphere of recognition concerning legal rights. On the one hand, a subject has a need to see herself as recognized for her irreducible difference as expressed by her own abilities, whereas on the other hand legal recognition is directed towards the traits universally held by subjects as persons equally entitled to rights, thus neglecting the irreducible subjective need for individual recognition (Honneth 1996, 122). While legal rights provide equal recognition to all members of a community as full members of society, social esteem is inherently individualistic and provides recognition on the grounds of distinctively assessed achievements. Recognition provided by rights is unconditional in character: everyone is entitled to it for the simple fact of being a member of society. By contrast, social esteem is conditionally given based on one's earned achievement, in conformity with what that particular society deems valuable⁹⁰. This difference recalls Charles Taylor's distinction between unconditional recognition, given to subjects just as human beings, and conditional recognition, linked to one's character and actions (Taylor 1994). These two spheres differently emphasize universality and particularity in recognition. Unlike the universality of rights, Honneth stresses that the logic of esteem cannot be abstracted from a community's particular set of values, that is, from the cultural specificity of normative assignments of status and honor. Esteem is necessarily given within the context of a culturally mediated scale of values, a hierarchy of worth defining what counts as a valuable contribution to the community and what does not.

In order to understand the individualistic logic of social esteem in the modern era, Honneth details its historical development. In the pre-modern world, social esteem was a matter of group-belonging. Social honor was the historical precedent for social esteem. Honor was accorded to subjects by virtue of their group membership (Honneth 1996, 123) according to a "corporative pattern" that tied the honor of individuals to their social belongings. The transition to modernity, however, challenged the group-based logic of honor allocation: with the "gradual dissolution of the traditional hierarchy of values" (Honneth 1996, 123), membership-based social honour ended up translating into "universal human dignity" through universal rights.

The individualization of esteem, as it were, results from this evolution. An individual enters "the contested field of social esteem as an entity individuated in terms of a particular life-story" (Honneth 1996, 125). This is the consequence of the dissolution of traditional patterns of value that assigned worth to persons "in advance", regardless of their actual contribution. Esteem, rather, is to be individually *earned*; in principle, it is not secured on the basis of one's family of origin or one's "estate", as in the pre-modern era. Achievement is individualized and esteem is earned by individuals by virtue of their valued accomplishments, not their collective traits (Honneth 1996, 126). In this way, recognition concerns not only what a person *is* but also

⁹⁰ "(...) legal relations cannot integrate all dimensions of social esteem as is already clear simply from the fact that, in accordance with its overall function, social esteem can only apply to those traits and abilities with regard to which members of society differ from one another. Persons can feel themselves to be "valuable" only when they know themselves to be recognized for accomplishments that they precisely do not share in an undifferentiated manner with others." (Honneth 1996, 125)

what a person *does* (Young 2007, 194). Clearly, a *meritocratic* ideal informs the concept of social esteem as something that has to be “earned”. Thus the pre-modern category of honor was historically replaced, moving from the “universalization of honor” as a universal concept of human dignity, to the “privatization of honor”, conceptualizing honor as related to personal attainment (Honneth 1996, 126; Deranty 2009, 302). Legal recognition embodied in the universality of rights cannot account for the meritocratic and individual expectations encompassed in social esteem, which depends on individuals’ efforts and is assessed by society’s particular scale of values. While rights consist of a universal, *equal* form of recognition, achievement consists of a selective, *unequal* recognition.

In the modern world, where the corporative pattern of honor has been dismissed, the recognition asymmetry is thus no longer between groups, but rather between “biographically individuated subjects”:

(...) “prestige” or “standing” signifies only the degree of social recognition the individual earns for his or her form of self-realization by thus contributing, to a certain extent, to the practical realization of society’s abstractly defined goals. (Honneth 1996, 126)

The asymmetry between individuals means that one person can be more esteemed than another: that is, people *compete* for recognition.

To be sure, the sets of values that provide the standards for attributing social esteem are not to be taken as simply ‘given’. They change with society. They are inherently dynamic and antagonistic. The question of how we should understand the values of different social contributions opens the path to social conflict. We may disagree about what kinds of accomplishments count as achievements deserving of social esteem. This underlying value pluralism can have socially disintegrative effects, undermining social cohesion (see also Smith 2009). Honneth’s suggests that such disintegrative consequences can be prevented if individuals see each other as having the chance to contribute to society through their talents and skills in a context of “societal integration”, where “individuals see themselves as having the *opportunity* to contribute meaningfully to society through the expression of their distinctive traits and abilities” (Smith 2009, 56)⁹¹.

Note, however, that in Honneth’s account the third sphere of recognition, the workplace, is not explicit in the 1992 book. There, Honneth generally refers to abilities and talents, without pointing to work as a privileged sphere of esteem. Indeed, abilities and talents that deserve social esteem can be expressed through a number of activities like art or sport, so there does not seem to be a special reference to work as the privileged context of the third sphere of recognition. At this stage, Honneth points to “ways of life” and “lifestyles” as involved in the achievement principle, rather than work.

Jean-Philippe Deranty (2009) remarks that, in the formulation of 1992, the concept of *Leistung* has “a highly abstract meaning” and is “less clearly tied to the work sphere” than Honneth’s later reflections, for it is “vaguely defined as the realization of ‘ethical goals’”

⁹¹ “Honneth’s way around this difficulty is to suggest that the potentially disintegrative effects of value-pluralism and the individualization of achievement are mitigated by a form of ‘societal integration’ in which individuals see themselves as having the *opportunity* to contribute meaningfully to society through the expression of their distinctive traits and abilities. Mutual recognition between such individuals does not require them to esteem each other’s contribution to society to the same degree – the individualization of achievement means that the degree of social esteem one receives depends on how successful one manages to be – but it does require that they all recognize each other as potential contributors, as having some chance of success” (Smith 2009, 56).

(Deranty 2009, 305). The ambivalent nature of the third sphere is even more evident in Honneth's *Suffering From Indeterminacy*, where the third sphere of recognition is identified in political participation. It is only in 2003 that Honneth connects the third sphere of recognition explicitly and quite exclusively with the division of labor. It seems that Honneth thus shifts his attention from a broader concept of esteem, applicable to different spheres of life, to an exclusively labor-mediated concept. Thus, Deranty plausibly asks whether there is a "major shift" in the conceptualization of the third sphere between 1992 and 2003. Deranty's answer is that there is no real shift between the two formulations, but rather "only a lack of precision in *The Struggle for Recognition*", which remains "unfortunately confusing" (Deranty 2009, 306). This view should take into account the fact that in Honneth's 2001 work, *Suffering From Indeterminacy*, the third sphere of recognition is identified as political participation. But it cannot be overlooked that in *The Struggle for Recognition* there is no explicit reference to work, and social esteem is conceived of as just a matter of "lifestyle". There, Honneth refers to forms of life as well as to "models of self-realization" of social groups; social esteem is thought of as applying to this, rather than to individual's capacities. The third sphere of recognition thus seems to be explanatorily underdetermined and subject to significant oscillation (see also Petrucciani 2009). The ambiguity of the third sphere is also seen in *Redistribution or Recognition?* where Honneth wonders whether the recognition of groups' identities should be included in the second sphere of recognition (legal rights), in a completely new sphere, or in the third sphere. Note also that after the project of a "critical conception of work" (Honneth 1982a), Honneth leaves aside the "paradigm of labor" (Honneth 1989), which has led to an almost complete removal of work from the theory of recognition of 1992.

Let us turn to the reflection of 2003 where the connection between esteem and work is explicit. In "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser", and particularly in the section "The Capitalist Recognition Order and Conflicts over Distribution" (Honneth 2003, 135-159), Honneth explicitly refers to social esteem in terms of the meritocratic idea of achievement at work. In his historical reconstruction of the evolution of the concept of esteem, from the corporative idea of honor to the individualized principle of achievement, he now includes "the religious valorization of paid work" (Honneth 2003, 140) as a key factor in the emergence of social esteem in its modern shape. While in *The Struggle for Recognition* the notion of esteem can be traced back to a number of activities not necessarily tied to labor, the sphere of social esteem here ends up being restricted, for it exclusively consists of "individual achievement within the structure of the industrially organized division of labor" (Honneth 2003, 140). Of course, the restriction of social esteem to the sphere of work comes at the cost of overlooking all the activities aside from labor through which individuals can be esteemed. This notion of esteem is narrow with respect to the different spheres of life that can involve valued contribution. The "productive citizen" thus becomes the exclusive subject of the third sphere of recognition (Honneth 2003, 141).

In what follows, I will propose a broader critical analysis than that of the contributive justice test proposed thus far. I will discuss some shortcomings of the achievement principle and propose an internal differentiation of the third sphere of recognition. I will proceed as follows. First, I will discuss the flip-side of the achievement principle, namely the stigmatization of failure which is entailed by its inner logic, showing that this concept has low critical potential in that it legitimates existing narratives on work and desert. Quite surprisingly, this puts Honneth's view closer to views like liberalism and luck egalitarianism.

Second, I will address the ideological character of achievement. Third, I will explore whether Honneth's example of gendered housework fits the normative scope of the achievement principle, showing that a close observation reveals that achievement is not able to grasp what is really at stake. Fourth, I will propose an internal differentiation of the third sphere of recognition (i.e. social esteem as meritocratic achievement and occupational prestige), arguing that this distinction better allows us to grasp normative conflicts involved in gendered housework and other unequal divisions of labor. I will show that the corporative pattern of social honor is still present in modern configurations of prestige hierarchies at work. Then, I will specify the reasons why the distinction I propose is preferable to other proposals relating to the third sphere of recognition. Finally, I will address the substantive lack of a norm of equality in Honneth's framework, as well as the internal tension between individual achievement and solidarity.

1.4.1. *Achievement and its Flip-Side: Guilt, the Stigmatization of Failure, and the Ethics of the "Social Crumbler"*

In his account of the third sphere of recognition, proposed in 2003, Honneth cedes to a conception of social esteem as "deserved achievement". Certainly, the idea of responsibility for one's achievements is implied by this meritocratic interpretation of social esteem. Assessed from the standpoint of identity formation, which is the very rationale of the theory of recognition (i.e. people should enjoy a positive relation to the self, and in order for this to be possible, they need to be socially recognized in the form of love, rights, and achievement), the principle of *achievement as merit* seems to lack of the normative potential present in the other spheres of recognition. Love and rights are by comparison far less questionable than the principle of achievement. Indeed, the principle seems to be more suited to describing and explaining the way the world actually works, rather than how it *should* be. In this way, it is also questionable whether the achievement principle actually fits the goals of critical theory. Its attitude to the social world is more descriptive and apologetic rather than critical and normative. As Nancy Fraser has compellingly stressed, Honneth's strategy "threatens to collapse normativity into the given" (Fraser 2003, 202). It lacks critical potential, especially when compared to the other spheres of recognition, love and rights. The "meritocratic" distributive rule underlying the achievement principle allocates money and goods according to individuals' earned successes in the labor market. The principle of achievement alone, intended as a mode of recognition which also determines distribution, appears to be very weak in terms of critical potential. In fact, it is hard to see where the critical potential of this idea actually lies.

What happens, indeed, to individuals that are not able, for one reason or another, to gain what Honneth says is fundamental to a person's identity formation and which, according to the meritocratic reading, they are to be held responsible? Arguably, they would feel guilty or see themselves as "losers". Those who do not get the wished achievement would be held responsible, and would be harmed precisely by the same logic that was supposed to provide them with a positive relation to the self, the achievement principle. A society that promotes achievement as inherently good would easily stigmatize failure and "blame the victim" for failed achievement. If the idea that success depends on individual effort is publicly encouraged and endorsed, in spite of the many arbitrary factors and structural impediments or advantages

that determine one's success, "failure becomes a matter of personal responsibility, and hence fault" (Smith 2009, 57). It seems then that Nicholas Smith is right in observing that "Honneth is too sanguine about the integrative potential of social esteem based on individual achievement. (...) Enormous responsibility is thrown onto the individual" (Smith 2009, 57)⁹². One can hardly see how this would benefit one's positive relation to the self, which is what Honneth cares most about. When assessed from the perspective of Honneth's ideal of positive self-relation, instead of self-esteem one would feel guilt, shame, and stigmatization. The essential point is that these feelings are part of the inner logic of the very idea of achievement, because the intensification of "the burden of failure" mirrors the intensification of the burden of achievement: as a result, stigmatized failure is the "reverse side of the individualized competition for social esteem" (Smith 2009, 57).

Seen from this perspective, one may draw the conclusion that the theory of recognition is not philosophically very far from a view that one would have expected it to contrast: luck egalitarianism. Recall John Roemer's stress on individual responsibility, individual effort and the virtues of competition, converging with the liberal views in the *external justice* thesis. Roemer's luck egalitarianism is particularly concerned with individuals' efforts and their responsibility for achieving success, so that – so he claims, drawing on Ronald Dworkin – distributive justice should provide economic and educational resources for fair competition. What justice is supposed to do is ensure that competition happens on fair terms. Sure, Roemer's concerns and overall framework is very different to Honneth's. Nonetheless, seen from the perspective of the achievement principle, we find in Honneth concepts that are common among distributive theorists when it comes to work: competition, opportunities, individual responsibility, as well as a notion of welfare equality (in 2003). Roemer, after all, is concerned with self-realization, just as Honneth is, and both share some commitment to the idea of equality of opportunity. No one seems to see competition as a matter for normative debate, given that competition inherently entails winners and losers, and thus, *a selective result for the idea of self-realization*: "self-realization for the few".

Despite Roemer's commitment to the norm of equality, and despite Honneth's emancipatory concerns, unequal forms of division of labor cannot even be seen as problematic if the only normative tool at our disposal is meritocratic achievement. The ideal of meritocracy – which certainly does not challenge contributive inequalities – seems to be, at this stage, the normative core of Honneth's normative representation of work. And as a result, Honneth's notion of esteem lacks critical potential against unjust labor structures. The implicit assumption is that the market is a perfect mechanism of job allocation, which neutralizes impediments to peer contribution: what success people enjoy is entirely up to them. The introduction of a form of welfare equality is supposed to limit these shortcomings.

However, sociologists of work have highlighted the highly arbitrary and fortuitous ways in which people find jobs: "the determination of the precise task that most individuals perform within the larger class of occupations lies in chiefly local, temporary, and fortuitous circumstances" (North 1926, 235; Hughes 2017 [1958]). This is even more evident when it comes to social esteem. The idea of social mobility underlying the concept of achievement is related to opportunities to climb the social scale, as it were – the idea that "highly esteemed positions (e.g., in the professions) are accessible to aspiring and capable individuals, regardless

⁹² Deranty raises a similar point: "the exact sense of the individualisation of social respect is that the individual is herself responsible, through her achievements and the realisation of her abilities, for her social standing" (Deranty 2009, 302).

of their origins” (Kantzara 2016, 3). However, in practice, “such positions are mainly occupied by individuals from a similarly highly esteemed social background” (Kantzara 2016, 3). For instance, studies on the role of one’s familial origins in shaping their “occupational fate”, as Everett Hughes called it, have shown that “paternal grand-fathers’ and mothers’ occupations have significant associations with sons’ occupations” (Scott H. Beck 1983, 273). But the way in which grandfathers’ and mothers’ occupations affect their sons’ and daughters’, is not merely restricted to the transmission of an occupational culture. There is also the passing on of what Pierre Bourdieu called “cultural capital” – that is, all the implicit and everyday knowledge that makes the difference when it comes to individuals’ educational and occupational attainment (Bourdieu 2016 [1979]; Bowles and Gintis 1976; 2002). Bowles and Gintis have shown the key role played by personal traits, rather than skills, in determining people’s success beyond the actual content of one’s curriculum (Bowles and Gintis 1976; 2002). It is also important to consider that rankings related to esteem for differential achievement underlie the risk of naturalizing differences of talent that result from educational social immobility (Schuppert 2015; Bowles and Gintis 1976).

The ethics and anthropology of the ‘social crumbler’ is directly entailed by the achievement principle – in a way that would hardly fit the ideal of solidarity that Honneth himself connects with the third sphere of recognition. The “aspirational class” (Currid-Halket 2017) of people aiming to improve their social condition by symbolic investments in their work are thus willing to replace money with esteem as the desired reward. This seems to be the logical endpoint of the anthropology of the social crumbler assumed by the achievement principle. It is not only at risk of underestimating the powerful role that the division of labor plays in reproducing social inequalities, but it also underestimates the way in which pre-existing inequalities in status and class, as well as other arbitrary factors like the place in which one is born, affect one’s chances of achieving. The view that the individual is the sole bearer of responsibility for achieving dangerously overlooks all of these crucial factors; as John Roemer did, it also tends to naturalize them.

1.4.2. *Ideology and the Struggle Over What Counts As “Achievement”*

The concept of achievement is thus inherently ambivalent. Its “legitimizing power” (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, 52) is at risk of ideology; rather than promoting personal autonomy, besides its emancipatory aspects relating to non ascriptive esteem, it may be said to engender “attitudes that conform to practices of domination” (Honneth 2007, 325; see also Bigi et al. 2015).

It is this awareness that has led Honneth to rectify the achievement model in his later writings. In “Paradoxes of Capitalism” (2006), he considers the paradoxes which make the achievement principle increasingly difficult to maintain. The questionable features of achievement are now acknowledged: Honneth stresses that people be assessed in the here and now and not globally; no obligations follow from one’s past achievements; some personality types benefit from greater consideration and thus chances for success than others; pressure to perform increases, and a blurring between the private and the public sphere occurs (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, 50). The anticipated positive aspects of personal freedom linked to the social-democratic era, seem to end up inverted, and “desolidarizing tendencies” arise

(Hartmann and Honneth 2006, 50)⁹³. The illusory side of achievement is thus explicitly thematized, in that it entails the view that people can enter competition equally on the basis of their abilities alone: achievement proves thus to be “a general social ordering principle of being an ideology since it tends systematically and with reference to a normative argumentative arsenal to justify inequalities” (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, 53). If the legitimating power of achievement is explicitly acknowledged and addressed, then the role of the principle in the overall theory of recognition becomes even more ambivalent (see also Kocyba 2011). After *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Redistribution or Recognition?* Honneth thus sees the need to rectify his reading of the achievement principle so as to include stronger critical insights.

Honneth is aware that the ethical standards by which achievement is socially assessed are not neutral, but result from social inequalities themselves, and produce distributive inequalities in turn. This awareness prevents him from giving a merely descriptive and meritocratic account of the third sphere. He stresses clearly that achievement can result from a “hegemonic”, “one-sided valuation”, which determines unequal economic distributions (Honneth 2003, 141) and thus “the privileged appropriation of particular resources like money or credentials” (Honneth 2003, 148; Offe 1976). The contrast between alternative readings of what counts as a socially valuable contribution, is rooted in the “social domination of some groups over others”. The legitimating power of the achievement principle is thus fully acknowledged. Arguably, the social groups that structure social hierarchies so as to provide one-sided meanings of achievement are social classes as well as ethnic and gendered groups (Deranty 2009, 304). If the ethical standards against which achievement is assessed depend on culturally mediated interpretations of what counts as achievement, ‘up-down’ and one-sided ideological interpretations are inherently part of the idea itself of achievement. If in his later work Honneth clarifies the normative limitations of the principle of achievement, the doubts expressed in the previous paragraph concerning the apologetic, rather than critical, significance of achievement, seem thus to be at least partially addressed.

However, note that in this framework, the “weakness” of the third sphere of recognition is, at the same time, a strength. Given that public meanings of the values that inform public ideals of what counts as achievement are culturally mediated and historically determined, they are always liable to facing debate and disagreement. What should count as deserving social worth is thus indefinitely open to reassessment (see also Deranty 2009; Smith 2009); this is what Honneth calls the “surplus of validity” of the concepts of recognition, as always exceeded by the possibility of contestation and change (Honneth 2003). It is thus in the unstable nature of the public values associated with achievement that we find the limitations to, as well as fruitful mobility of the concept:

the worth accorded to various forms of self-realisation and even the manner in which the relevant qualities and abilities are defined fundamentally depend on the dominant interpretations of societal goals in each historical case. But since the content of such interpretations depends in turn on which social groups succeed in publicly interpreting their own accomplishments and forms of life in a way that shows them to be especially valuable, this secondary interpretive practice cannot be understood to be anything other than an ongoing cultural conflict. In modern societies, relations of social esteem are subject to a permanent struggle, in which different groups attempt, by means

⁹³ “Beyond this, network capitalism is colonizing spheres of action that were previously distant from utility thereby introducing the principles of achievement and exchange into the field of asymmetrical reciprocity structured by solidarity”

of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities associated with their way of life. (Honneth 1996, 126-127)

The principle of achievement is thus far from enjoying a unanimous social consensus. A “permanent struggle” over its correct interpretation makes the third sphere of recognition inherently unstable and antagonistic, and thus internally open to evolution and change. Such internal openness to change allows Honneth’s principle to come apart from the principle of merit, for in this way the idea of achievement is loaded with a potential critical meaning.

Nonetheless, it is hard to understand why, even if the third sphere of recognition remains so unstable, controversial and inherently antagonistic, it is not amended by Honneth in a more substantive way. After all, the other spheres of recognition – love and rights – are not as problematic, for they provide a clear counterfactual yardstick with which to assess social reality and ground normative claims. Achievement, rather, is problematic from the start: it does not seem to have the same critical-normative potential, and it lends itself to justifying current asymmetries of power. Why, then, should it have such weight in Honneth’s theory? Which resources are there in Honneth’s framework to counterbalance the “domination effects” of the principle of recognition as merit? Is the concept of “surplus validity” sufficient?

The problem is that there seems to be no clear standard which allows us to discern between what deserves esteem and what does not (Fraser 2003); and it is hard to believe that such an assessment could be “neutral”. Furthermore, individuals’ contributions are not exactly comparable: although the horizon of value is shared, there can always be competing interpretations about the proper ends of society (Petrucciani 2009). How, then, could this idea of social esteem as achievement be helpful for a conception of labor justice? That people aim at being recognized by others for their unique contribution to society is plausible, and it is supported by empirical research (Dejours 1993; Clot 1999). But does this suffice?

1.4.3. *The Limited Scope of the Achievement Principle: Gendered Housework*

Honneth’s reference to gendered housework as a paradigmatic case of social disesteem as per the third sphere of recognition is reoccurring: besides *The Struggle for Recognition*, it is also present in the Introduction of *The Fragmented World of the Social* (1995), and in *Redistribution or Recognition?* (2003). Given the considerations made thus far, one might well ask: does gendered housework fit under the scope of the principle of achievement?

Note that the term “unfairness” is not inappropriate here. To be sure, Honneth does not aim to formulate a theory of justice in the way theorists of justice usually do. What interests him are the moral injuries that affect one’s self-relation, not issues of justice. However, while in *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth does not explicitly talk about social justice but of moral injuries affecting one’s positive relation to the self, in *Redistribution or Recognition?* the reference to “social justice” becomes explicit (Honneth 2003; Petrucciani 2009)⁹⁴.

In order to address the question of gendered housework, thus, one should identify the norm that allows Honneth to consider it as unjust. What is unfair in the gendered division of housework? The “merit principle” (Honneth 2003) says that we should be socially esteemed for our unique talents and abilities. According to this norm, gendered housework may be

⁹⁴ “In *Redistribuzione o riconoscimento?* quella che in *Lotta per il riconoscimento* veniva senz’altro definita come una “teoria della vita buona” viene per la prima volta presentata nei termini di un “concetto teorico-riconoscitivo di giustizia” (Petrucciani 2009, 199-200)

deemed unfair in that women cannot be esteemed for their talents and abilities *because* housework is socially dismissed as not “real work”. The norm thus seems to require that housework be publicly valued as a fully-fledged contribution to society, because otherwise women cannot be recognized for their talents. However, suppose that housework is publicly valued as “real work” on a par with other occupations. Would this suffice to ensure that women do not remain the primary bearers of care responsibilities? This is certainly not a necessary consequence. I argue that what is unfair in the gendered division of labor is not only that housework is underrecognized as a less valuable contribution to social cooperation, but also that it is *unequally shared* (see Wright et al. 2009). As I will argue in the following paragraphs, the achievement principle needs to be complemented with a norm of equality in order to address these issues (*autonomy without equality barrier*).

Individualized meritocratic achievement at work and public recognition of a *sphere* of activities as qualifying as “work” are not the same thing. A woman performing housework cannot achieve social esteem for her contributions first and foremost because of public failures to recognize housework *as* “work” to begin with – quite independently from the quality of her efforts. But the fact that housework is socially dismissed as not real work concerns a qualitatively different sphere of problems. Honneth refers to achievement interchangeably as the outcome of individual effort *and* as the public recognition of a category of work as worthwhile⁹⁵. However, they should be more accurately distinguished because, while related, they point to different issues. In order to grasp this nuance, we should discern between two meanings of social esteem here:

- *social esteem for one’s individual achievement; and*
- *the prestige of occupational categories in the ladder of labor value.*

Work activities are socially organized around hierarchies of prestige that are *relatively* independent from individuals’ efforts, as well as from the actual content of their work, and structured along publicly circulating social narratives of what makes one form of work “superior” to another. This phenomenon was illuminated by Everett Hughes decades ago. If “a man’s (*sic*) work is one of the things by which he is judged” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 42), such judgement is addressed not merely to the actual way in which that person performs their work, but also to the type of work they do.

Hughes distinguishes between the ways in which people enter the division of labor, the ways in which they relate to their occupations, and the “implied standing of the occupation in the eyes of the community” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 32). Each of these dimensions involves specific layers of social esteem, as it were, which are not easily merged together. Approaching gendered housework with these classifications in mind, we see that injustice does not lie so much in the fact that women’s achievements in carework are not valued in meritocratic terms, but rather in the *low standing of the occupation in the eyes of the community*, which is essentially beyond their control. Such internal differentiation of social esteem allows us to be more precise in determining what is wrong with a form of the division of labor, and thus to be more effective in the measures of redress.

1.4.4. *Two Concepts of Esteem: Meritocratic Achievement and Occupational Prestige*

⁹⁵ Indeed, in 1992 he includes also lifestyles and models of self-realization, but now I’m confining myself to the specific issue of work.

Honneth refers to individual achievement and to hierarchies of occupational status as interchangeable concepts, overlooking their differences. He tends to merge these two concepts into one idea of achievement, since sometimes he refers to meritocratic achievement, and sometimes to “the standard of social hierarchy” (Honneth 2003, 143). Their difference is never addressed distinctively⁹⁶. This comes at the cost of potential confusion and a mixing up of occupational prestige with individual achievement. His reference to the paradigmatic case of gendered housework makes it clear that the third sphere of recognition would have benefited from a more explicit internal differentiation into two sub-concepts: social esteem as *personal achievement*, and social esteem as *occupational prestige*.

The subject of the first sub-concept is, generally, the worker’s *individual* performance, whereas the subject of the second sub-concept is the socially perceived worth of *occupational categories*. The former sub-concept refers to an individual’s particular performance (recall the “biographically individuated subjects” replacing the corporative patterns of social honor), and values the outcomes obtained through one’s work according to the community’s particular standards. The latter sub-concept points to the public representations of the social worth attributed to spheres of activities and occupational roles, or in other words, the social reputation of occupational categories assessed through the yardstick of socially established professional hierarchies (see Kantzara 2001; 2016; Hughes 2017 [1958]). The personal satisfaction of an individual in her recognized merit is different from the social standing of occupational categories, even though they are deeply intertwined. Personal satisfaction results from the actual contribution of an individual. Occupational prestige is *attached* to occupations and thus is relatively independent to individuals’ “actual” contributions. The latter seems to follow its own, independent logic. As Ralf Dahrendorf has observed, “social stratification is always a rank order in terms of “prestige” and not “esteem”, i.e. a rank order of positions (“worker”, “woman”, “resident of a certain area”, etc.) which can be thought of independently of their individual incumbents” (Dahrendorf 1972, 101).

Merging together these two meanings leaves us with a partial account of the social devaluation of gendered housework. In fact, according to Honneth, the reasons lie in “naturalistic thinking, which attributes essentialist collective properties to social subgroups so that their practical efforts are not viewed as “achievement” or “work”, but merely as the realization of an “innate” nature” (Honneth 2003, 148)⁹⁷. However, naturalistic thinking is not the only factor at play in the contributive subordination of occupational groups (see also Young 2007). Consider other forms of contributive subordination that are not gender-based, but which nonetheless reserve undesired tasks for certain groups; consider dirty work, for instance, which is mostly reserved for the lower classes, and very often for racialized people. In these cases, naturalistic thinking would imply the view that, say, people of color and migrants are naturally suited for dirty work. But rather than thinking naturalistically, there are forms of rationalization and public justification of such contributive inequalities, where the low prestige of certain occupations *goes with* the low social status of groups (see also Walzer 1983, chap. II; see Chapter IV).

⁹⁶ Many authors have been observing the under-determination of the third sphere of recognition, see Ikhaimo and Laitinen 2010; Deranty 2009; Seglow 2009; Petrucciani 2009.

⁹⁷ “Within the social-ontological horizon of this naturalism, the activities of the housewife or mother, for instance, are never viewed as a “productive” contribution to social reproduction that would justify any form of social esteem, while women’s work in the formally organized sector is not believed to be as productive as that of men, since according to women’s nature involves less physical or mental exertion” (Honneth 2003, 148)

The distinction that I have proposed fits with the sociologist Everett Hughes' reference to two kinds of "occupational mobility". Hughes discerns between individual and collective occupational mobility, within a dynamic and conflictual account of achievement that may fit Honneth's agonistic view:

There are two kinds of occupational mobility. One is individual. The individual makes the several choices, and achieves the skills which allow him to move to a certain position in the occupational, and thus – he hopes – in the social and economic hierarchy. His choice is limited by several conditions, among which is the social knowledge available to him at the time of crucial decision, a time which varies for the several kinds of work.

The other kind of occupational mobility is that of a group of people in an occupation, i.e., of the occupation itself. (...) At any rate, it is common in our society for occupational groups to step their occupation up in the hierarchy by turning it into a profession. (...) In my own studies I passed from the false question "Is this occupation a profession?" to the more fundamental one, "What are the circumstances in which the people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession, and themselves into professional people?" (Hughes 2017 (1958), 44).

There is an individual struggle for recognition and a collective struggle for recognition, and both have their specificities. Whereas individuals compete with other individuals in order to gain recognition for their capacities, groups compete with other groups for the social affirmation of their occupational categories – that is, for their professionalization. What Hughes calls "the journey towards respectability" involves both individuals and groups, but in different ways. The idea of "professionalization" is part of a collective, competitive struggle for the recognition of a body of work activities (Hughes 2017 [1958]; Lanher 2016)⁹⁸. These 'struggles' occur through different time-periods: individuals throughout their lives, and occupational groups across years, decades or even centuries (e.g., carework).

It is clear that the second sub-concept of occupational prestige is different from "individual achievement" in the sense of the principle of merit. Public acknowledgment of (typically) gendered housework as "work" rather than the dismissal of it as purely naturalistic love is not so much a matter of "achievement" understood as individual merit, but rather of political visibility and of socially ranked prestige which resonate with groups' social status. The "social drama of work" (Hughes 2017 [1958], 47) cannot be abstracted from hierarchies of standing in the eyes of the community where individuals and groups are differently engaged⁹⁹.

Of course, these concepts cannot be completely isolated from one another. There are ways in which they are intertwined. On the one hand, individual success is hardly possible if one is confined into a low prestige occupation: whatever one's level of effort may be, one's abilities would not be properly recognized because of the low esteem "pre-attributed" to the occupation. In this case, actual contribution and esteem for achievement tend to be detached from one another. On the other hand, occupational prestige is not really rooted in the internal aspects of the activity nor in the quality of individuals' work. On the contrary, just as the efforts of an individual engaged in a low prestige occupation can hardly improve the prestige of the occupation itself, the reversal is also true: workers can benefit from prestige even though their contribution is relatively low in terms of quantity and quality. In the first case, where one exercises their abilities within an occupation with low prestige, this prestige can be said

⁹⁸ "Many new and some old occupations have sought for themselves the envied status of profession; some of them succeed in gaining that esteem, that broad license to control their work and that social mandate over affairs pertaining to it that the term profession connotes." (Hughes 2017 (1958), 7-8)

⁹⁹ "We may make a rough classification of the types of places in the division of labor according to (1) the manner in which the persons enter, (2) the attitude of the person to his occupation, and (3) the implied standing of the occupation in the eyes of the community." (Hughes 32).

to negatively affect their chances of getting individual achievement-recognition despite considerable effort. In the second case, where one is lowly engaged in their work within a high prestige occupation, this prestige can be said to positively affect their chances of getting individual achievement despite low effort. The more occupational prestige, the less effort needed to get social esteem. The less occupational prestige, the more effort needed to get social esteem. This means that *the prestige of the occupation significantly affects the contribution required to get social esteem*.

On the whole, occupational prestige allows indirect advantages and disadvantages to significantly affect the ways in which individuals get achievement. To be sure, the prestige of doctors and physicians does not necessarily allow them to make less of an effort in order to get achievement. Nonetheless, it is worth considering this point *from the perspective of the worst off* (recall Hughes' invitation to consider these problems from the position of least prestige, 2017 [1958]) – the dirty worker, no matter how excellently she performs the job, would suffer from low social esteem because of the low prestige of the occupation, independently to the quality of her actual contribution, which crystallizes the worth socially attributed to the job. Occupational prestige thus follows a distinct logic from performance-based achievement.

Consider the prestige differential between a waste collector and a lawyer. The waste collector may be particularly engaged in her tasks, performing them with precision, care, and punctuality, and thus meets the socially valued standards of a “good worker”. But her efforts would not suffice to gain social esteem, because waste collecting is not a prestigious occupation. The lawyer, by contrast, would be likely to benefit from the surplus of prestige attached to the occupation, which is roughly independent to the actual qualities of her own contribution.

Of course, both of these sub-concepts are subject to ideological distortion – or, to put it differently, they are culturally mediated and subject to one-sided readings. Without differentiating between meritocratic achievement and occupational prestige, one would not be able to grasp the difference between the relative control that individuals can exercise over their contribution, and the pre-existing and relatively independent prestige attached to occupations. In terms of contributive costs, the waste collector bears higher contributive costs to gain lower rewards, whereas the lawyer bears lower contributive costs to gain higher rewards in terms of social esteem. Thus the lawyer can actually free-ride on the historically construed social reputation of her profession and thus get esteem independently from her specific talents and ‘individual difference’.

Note that the usefulness of this distinction can be appreciated also with respect to the distributive side of achievement. According to Honneth, in fact, achievement mediates people's monetary rewards – that is, their wage. Thus the more you achieve through your contribution, the more you earn. However, the distinction helps to understand that one's earnings do not merely mirror one's actual, particular performance, valued in its own sake. Rather, earnings are considerably affected by the prestige of one's occupation, and often this happens regardless of the efforts of individuals to see their unique capacities recognized.

On the whole, the ascribed and achieved sides of social esteem co-exist in a way that should be more accurately represented. It seems that one should discern between the *respectability* of one's occupational role, and *recognition* for one's actual contribution. This distinction makes it clear that “striving to acquire or to ‘accumulate’ valuable traits and objects is not sufficient to gain prestige” (Kantzara 2016). As Everett Hughes has shown, some “high” professions are

rewarded with social esteem independently from the internal features of the job as well as from the quality of individual contributions¹⁰⁰. It is not so much in some inherent excellence in the internal qualities of “high professions” that their social esteem is grounded, but rather in the collective efforts of those who work in such professions to persuade the public of a certain social image of their activity (Hughes 2017 [1958]; 1974; Lanher 2016). This is also explicitly acknowledged by Honneth, who considers the intersection between recognition and the division of labor with reference to women: “an examination of the relevant research quickly shows that the undervaluing of predominantly female professions is not due to the actual content of the work” (Honneth 2003, 154).

1.4.5. *The Corporative Pattern of Esteem and the “Moral Division of Labor”: Achieved vs Ascribed Esteem; Professionals vs Nonprofessionals*

If occupational prestige is relatively independent to the actual contributions of individuals, then it is no longer certain that what Honneth calls the “corporative pattern” of pre-modern social honor has been entirely replaced by individual achievement in the modern era. To recall, Honneth describes achievement as resulting from an evolution of the spheres of recognition which runs from the corporative notion of social honor, typical of the pre-modern era, to individualized achievement as esteem for one’s abilities and talents. However, occupational prestige could be understood as a corporative form of attributing esteem, and is *still present in the contemporary world*. From what Honneth calls “corporative” to the individualized model of esteem, elements of the old model of esteem thus persist. The evolution of the third sphere of recognition proposed in *The Struggle for Recognition*, thus, should not be understood as a fully achieved movement from corporative social honor to individualized achievement, *because corporative forms of social esteem are still at work in modernity under the shape of occupational prestige*¹⁰¹; occupational prestige is not “meritocratic”: it is ascribed, not achieved. To paraphrase Everett Hughes’s words on status, occupational prestige “is never peculiar to the individual; it is historic” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 57). Therefore, the emancipatory side of achievement, that is, the modern idea that one’s ascribed traits should not count in the attribution of positions as much as one’s actual abilities, gets lost in the idea of occupational prestige, which reintroduces a pre-modern, conservative element of ascription (see Hartmann and Honneth 2006, 53-54). The distinction between achieved esteem and occupational prestige fits the following distinction recalled by Michael Walzer:

A contemporary sociologist warns us against confusing the status of individuals with their “reputational qualities”. Status, Frank Parkin argues, is a function of place, profession, and office, not of particular recognitions of particular achievements. The abolition of titles is not the abolition of classes. *Conceptions of honor are more controversial than they were under the old regime, but distributions are still patterned, dominated now by occupation rather than by blood or rank*. Hence, on the one hand, the insolence of office and, on the other, the degradation of the men and women who do society’s hard and dirty work. In the Hobbesian race, many of the runners are running in place, unable to break through the constraints of the larger pattern. Nor can that pattern usefully be described as the product of their own valuations, a kind of social shorthand for the recognition of individuals.

¹⁰⁰ “(...) some of the kinds of work involved in the whole system (...) are more respected and more removed from temptation and suspicion than others. In fact, the division of labor among lawyers is as much one of respectability (hence of self concept and role) as of specialized knowledge and skills. One might call it a moral division of labor” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 71)

¹⁰¹ It is thus not really true that “the esteem the individual legitimately deserved within society was no longer decided by membership in an estate with corresponding codes of honor, but rather by individual achievement within the structure of the industrially organized division of labor” (Honneth 2003, 140).

There is indeed such a shorthand, but it derives from the dominant ideology, itself a function of office and power – so that office holders command respect in the same way that they command high salaries, without having to prove their worth to their fellow workers or their clients. (Walzer 1983, 256, emphasis added)

As far as it goes, this account entails that whereas *achieved esteem* tends to rely upon individuals' performance, *ascribed esteem* relies on the prestige attached to the occupations. The relationship between them is complex¹⁰².

Consider that the social framework in which people are to achieve social esteem is pre-emptively circumscribed by ascribed esteem. Socially low-ranked people can get achievement, but not outside of prescribed socially defined settings (or at least, not easily). The tension between achievable esteem and ascribed esteem can take the shape of an identarian antagonism. In her study of the intersections between class and gender in England, Beverly Skeggs (1997) has shown that women from popular environments who mostly work in care and social work occupations, tend to embrace a sort of ethics of the “devoted self” whose ultimate goal is to compensate them for the low worth socially attributed to their activity. This strategy, supposed to compensate for low occupational prestige, allows women to ‘prove’ their ‘moral superiority’ to middle class and upper-class women, who are represented as lacking a “devoted self” (Skeggs 1997). Consider also the identarian strategies that dirty workers pursue to counterbalance the low occupational prestige and stigmatization they suffer, including strongly shared cultures, ideologies and “social weighting practices (i.e. selective comparisons and differential weighting of outsiders’ views)” designed to protect them “from the identity threat that stigma represents” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, 414). In so doing, they compensate for the lack of resources for achievable esteem through strategies that redefine their identities within the social ladder of worth.

Consider the illuminating observations of Everett Hughes on the subject:

(...) A common dignifying rationalization of people in all positions of a work hierarchy except the very top one is, “We in this position save the people in the next higher position above from their own mistakes”. The notion that one saves a person of more acknowledged skill, and certainly of more acknowledged prestige and power, than one’s self from his mistakes appears to be particularly satisfying. (...) The people in lower ranks are thus using a powerful psychological weapon when they rationalise their worth and indispensability as lying in their protection of people in higher ranks from their mistakes. (Hughes 2017 [1958], 46)

These strategies draw from identarian resources of pride, shared intra-group culture, ideology, and more broadly “social and psychological arrangements and devices by which men (*sic*) make their work tolerable, or even glorious to themselves and others” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 48). The antagonistic dynamics at work in identity and status renegotiation is part of what Hughes calls “the social drama of work”. Significantly, janitors who were interviewed about the toughest part of their jobs responded by referring not only to “garbage” but also to “the tenants don’t cooperate – them bastards. You tell them today, and tomorrow there is the same mess” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 48). In this case, the janitor endures a “*status pain*” as well as “a chronic fight for status” and social dignity (Hughes 2017 [1958], 50-53): “it is the tenant who interferes most with his own dignified ordering of his life and work. If it were not for a

¹⁰² I am freely re-adapting here Linton’s (1936) distinction between achieved and ascribed status (see also Thye and Witwoski 2005; Kantzara 2016).

tenant who had broken a window, he could have got his regular Sunday cleaning done on time (...). It is the tenant who causes the janitor's status pain" (Hughes 2017 [1958], 50).

These pursued strategies of identity renegotiation may be considered as indicators of the tension between individuals' aspirations for social esteem for their contributions, and the ascribed character of occupational prestige. These examples support the thesis that one should not consider social esteem and achievement in abstraction from crystallized social worth attached to occupational positions.

The problematic character of this tension is not fully accounted for by the idea of positive self-relation. After all, dirty workers, careworkers and cleaners considered in these examples tend to construct counter-identities strongly rooted in group culture, which may be seen as meeting the requirements of Honneth's idea of positive identity formation. It follows thus that one should go beyond the level of personal identity to criticize the unequal work structures that underlie the very existence of dirty workers' situations and the ladder of occupational prestige. Identity seems not to be the best standpoint from which to critically assess the unequal access to social dignity that these workers experience. In Chapter IV, I will argue that the concept of status may be better suited to this purpose, drawing from Nancy Fraser's work as well as on relational egalitarianism (see Chapter IV).

The structural placement of occupations along an ideal hierarchy of standing that relies upon the crystallization of prestige is embedded in the concept itself of a "profession", namely "an occupation which has attained a special standing among occupations" (Hughes 2017 [1958], 157), which is "not so much a descriptive term as one of value and prestige" (Hughes 2017 [1958], 44)¹⁰³. The distinction between *professionals* and *nonprofessionals* structures the division of labor in such a way that is not merely defined by income and the nature of the tasks performed, but also by prestige and standing (Young 1990, chap. 7). Each occupation has its aura of prestige and each occupational group attempts to increase its "standing in the eyes of the community":

Many people in our society work in named occupations. The names are a combination of price tag and calling card. One has only to hear casual conversation to sense how important these tags are. Hear a salesman, who has just been asked what he does, reply, "I am in sales work", or "I am in promotional work", not "I sell skillets". (...) Social scientists emphasize the science end of their name. These hedging statements in which people pick the most favorable of several possible names of their work imply an audience. And one of the most important things about any man is his audience, or his choice of the several available audiences to which he may address his claims to be someone of worth. (...) There is something almost as irrevocable about choice of the occupation as there is about choice of a mate. (...) The language about work is so loaded with value and prestige judgements, and with defensive choice of symbols (...). (Hughes 2017 (1958), 42-43)

The distinction between meritocratic achievement and social prestige allows us to discern between two qualitatively different, and yet deeply interwoven, dynamics. It stresses the importance of the limits of one's control over their achievement, and thus, if properly acknowledged, it prevents the shortcomings of the meritocratic interpretation of achievement (e.g. stigmatization of "failure"). While clearly acknowledging this dynamics, Honneth's notion of achievement should have made explicit this internal distinction in order to better identify the nature of the interaction between ascribed esteem and achieved esteem. The

¹⁰³ (...) The term profession is a symbol for a desired conception of one's work and, hence, of one's self. The movement to "professionalize" an occupation is thus collective mobility of some among the people in an occupation. (Hughes 2017 (1958), 44)

relative independence of social prestige from the inherent characteristics of the activity itself as well as from the actual contribution of individuals makes it clear that there is a considerable amount of arbitrariness in the way esteem is socially attributed. In this sense, the public devaluation of gendered housework, to take Honneth's recurrent example, could be said to reflect social hierarchies of value that dismiss care and housework as a lower form of contribution, because housework and care have not won the *struggle for professionalization* rather than merely due to naturalistic thinking. Considered from this perspective, specifying Honneth's notion of achievement so as to include also occupational prestige allows us to contextualize individuals' efforts within a broader framework where pre-existing patterns of occupational prestige mediate – either by facilitating or impeding – people's access to social esteem, given that some benefit from the prestige of the occupation and others don't, independently from their actual abilities.

Despite the promises of the achievement model, a dose of “occupational fate”, as Everett Hughes called it, is thus always there. It should count in the critical assessment of achievement as a normative concept of work. Esteem cannot be accounted for in isolation from the ladder of labor value, where there is an unequal distribution of social dignity attached to occupations which pre-exists individuals' actual contributions. I have just made use of an expression that Honneth used in his early writings, where he conceptualized work in terms of inequality of recognition and autonomy, which he later abandoned. If Honneth had maintained this perspective, he could have explicitly articulated the internal complexities of the notion of achievement and contextualized it into a framework of fixed inequalities reproduced through the division of labor. With this perspective, we would not incur the flaws of a merely individualistic account of achievement, and would prevent demeaning attitudes which stigmatize failure.

1.4.6. *Alternative Interpretations of the Third Sphere of Recognition*

The general agreement in the critical literature that the third sphere of recognition is unsatisfactory and philosophically ambivalent (Le Goff and Lazzeri 2016; Seglow 2009; Petrucciani 2009), has led many authors to suggest possible alternative ways to articulate the sphere. Ikaheimo and Laitinen (2010) for instance point to a “contributorial” concept of esteem, arguing that “esteem as a form of recognition is always based on contributions, so *contributorial* esteem covers everything there is to esteem as a form of recognition” (Ikaheimo and Laitinen 2010, 99). Ikaheimo thinks that what is specific to this concept is its *personifying* character (“recognizing is ‘taking something/someone as a person’”, 101) as well as an inherent sense of *gratitude* for one's contribution for the good of others. Of course, people's interests in being esteemed at work implies that they are not working merely for money (Ikaheimo and Laitinen 2010, 110). This seems correct.

Nonetheless, there is a relevant difference between arguing that people do not work only for money and making a claim about what follows from this:

That is, if his moral expectation is appropriate, his activity has to be motivated – to some minimal extent at least – by an intrinsic or non-instrumental wish to contribute to the good of the others, or to the common good. As romantic as this may sound on first hearing, it implies that a person worthy of recognition-*esteem* has to have some *love* towards those to whose life he contributes. This, I believe, suggests that the principle of contribution structuring moral expectations within

the sphere of wage-labour points to an economy that is not (or perhaps rather not only) one of exchange, but rather one of *gift*. (Ikaheimo and Laitinen 2010, 110).

Despite their suggestive character, Ikaheimo's conclusions are not justified. The moral interest in recognition does not imply, as such, that the subject has "love" for the common good: the interest could, for example, be grounded on mere personal pleasure. Plenty of people who we esteem for their work contribute to the common good or express excellence in their fields without necessarily being motivated by philanthropic reasons. The "contributational" concept of esteem is thus ethically overloaded.

More compellingly, Jonathan Seglow (2009) has proposed that we distinguish between a *contributive* and *meritocratic* interpretation of social esteem: whereas the former results from one's contributions to the social good or to the good of others, the latter is linked to one's performance in the workplace. Examples of professions conducive to contributive esteem could be social work, science, art, and so on; an example of one conducive to meritocratic esteem could be engineering. The central idea is that to esteem someone for one's *contribution* is not the same as esteeming them for their *merit*. Contributational esteem is about a person's input into social reproduction; think about volunteering or childcare. Meritocratic esteem is about meeting some socially determined standards of achievement: think of science, sport, and business. Contributational esteem is "more egalitarian" in that it "does not involve graded judgements of performance". It involves a different ethos: the communitarian ethos of contribution and the meritocratic ethos of achievement, "conjuring up competing visions of the good society" (Seglow 2009, 69).

Seglow's proposal looks compelling. After all, one can easily grasp the difference between these two ethics of work, also affecting the way esteem is attributed. Nonetheless, some difficulties remain. First, it is hard to draw a clear line between these two kinds of esteem, for they seem to overlap (as Seglow himself acknowledges). For instance, a doctor could be said to be esteemed in both senses: for contributing to the common good *and* for individual meritocratic achievement. More importantly, it is doubtful that graded judgements of performance do not also concern contributational esteem. Consider, for instance, that there are grades of judgements for the way childcare is performed: witness social standards of how a "good mother" (or good educator) should be, and they will certainly seem to be relevant to the attribution of social esteem for women's carework. Another difficulty in Seglow's distinction is that it requires, for each case, that the "recipients" of one's work be identified. Does your work benefit others, or merely yourself? This question necessarily leads to controversial answers because of the lack of universal metrics to assess this matter.

Therefore, even if he highlights some important differences between two interpretations of esteem, Seglow's distinction is not really of help when it comes to labor justice. Unlike Ikaheimo's, the distinction that I have proposed is not grounded in substantive suppositions of the feelings of the actors (i.e. love for the common good). Unlike Seglow's, it does not require the identification of the recipients of one's contributions, and thus avoids the problem of needing metrics. Moreover, it gives greater visibility to factors that are independent from individuals in the attribution of esteem, by stressing the social crystallization of occupational prestige hierarchies.

1.4.7. *An Odd Couple: Equality and Achievement*

Given its intrinsically competitive nature, achievement is certainly not an egalitarian principle: rather than questioning current inequalities, it provides a justification for them. The third sphere has to do with the recognition of the unique, *different* contributions of individuals, and this requires a *selective* attribution of social esteem. Also, note that, notwithstanding what Paul Gomberg believes (Gomberg 2007), social esteem is a scarce resource: people do not dispense esteem so easily (Sennett 2004; Brennan and Pettit 2004). Therefore, equality and esteem seem to be mutually incompatible concepts. Indeed, one may conclude that talking about equality when addressing social esteem makes little sense. It is not by accident, after all, that in Honneth's theory, the egalitarian form of recognition is contained in legal rights (the second sphere) rather than in esteem. Significantly, Honneth refers to the second sphere as the "equality principle (the norm of legal relations)" and to the third sphere as "the achievement principle (the standard of social hierarchy)" (Honneth 2003, 143), as if equality and esteem were mutually exclusive. The underlying assumption seems to be that equality is a matter of rights and of the formal status of citizens, whereas work is contained within the realm of hierarchies and inequalities.

It is no surprise, then, that Honneth is mostly interested in issues of individual freedom, autonomy, and self-realization, which is reflected in his normative concepts of work¹⁰⁴. This is what I have called the *autonomy without equality* barrier. Whereas the self-development model requires work to be an expressive and formative experience due to the externalization of one's capacities in the product of one's labor, achievement requires that the worker gets social esteem for her unique contribution; in both of Honneth's normative concepts of work, equality is not part of the framework. This brings his perspective philosophically near to the liberal views of meaningful work: just like them, his theory does not address inequalities in the division of labor, for it is restricted to a concern for individual freedom (see Chapter V). The risk of a *stratified notion of recognition*, or of "recognition for the few", is thus concrete. This way, instead of being a powerful critical tool, recognition may work as a legitimating principle for currently existing social rankings.

Consider the struggles that individuals go through on a daily basis to be socially recognized for their work, accurately described by ethnographers and sociologists of work (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Newman 2009; Hodson 2001). Consider, for instance, the ways in which butchers and janitors make recognition claims and pretensions so that their contributions may be recognized on a par with those of others. Their claims are better understood in relation to others' positions in the social ranking, rather than in isolation. There is a wide literature concerning the ways in which people working in low ranked occupations negotiate their demands for recognition in a socially hostile environment that tends to demean their work (Hughes 2017 [1958]; Newman 2009; Dubet 2013). See, for instance, the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), who highlight how dirty workers adopt counter-strategies to improve the self-image in a context that tends to stigmatize them. According to Everett Hughes, to study a social phenomenon from the perspective of a point of least prestige is a methodologically advantageous (Hughes 2017 [1958], 49). Those engaged in low-prestige occupations make claims and pretensions that cannot be understood in isolation from higher-prestige occupations. The problem of the janitor – Hughes argues – is not garbage itself, but tenants'

¹⁰⁴ "Honneth supports Kantian liberalism inasmuch as self-fulfilment is conceived principally as the achievement of autonomy. But he departs from it significantly in conceiving autonomy and other interests as latent capacities that must be actualized by recognition" (Seglow 2009, 61).

interferences¹⁰⁵: “It is the tenant who causes the janitor’s *status pain*. The physical disgusting part of the janitor’s work is directly involved in his relations with other actors in his work drama” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 51; Gold 1952, 487–493, emphasis added). Contributive inequality re-emerges here in the form of *status pain* which brings about a struggle for esteem in the ladder of labor value. Unfortunately, in Honneth’s account of achievement, the social dimension of inequality so brilliantly highlighted by Everett Hughes gets lost. Social esteem is not contextualized to the moral tensions between different positions in a labor hierarchy.

The achievement principle does not provide tools with which to promote contributive equality: recall racialized dirty work, occupational segregation, the division between conception and execution, the gendered division of labor, and so forth. Furthermore, the case of gendered housework that Honneth himself takes to be a paradigmatic example of social disesteem in the third sphere shows that in order to redress unfairly unequal divisions of labor some norm of equality is needed. I argued earlier that what is wrong with gendered housework is *not only* the dismissal of it as unproductive work, thus leaving it with insufficient social consideration, but also the unequal division of its responsibilities. A counterfactual understanding of equality is needed if we want to question the way housework is shared and, thus, that to address contributive injustice. Otherwise, even though housework may end up being recognized as a fully-fledged form of contribution and work, as the achievement principle requires, this would not guarantee as such that its duties do not remain reserved for a certain particular social group. What is lacking in Honneth’s framework is an idea of *social equality* (see Chapter IV).

Nonetheless, in Honneth’s theory there are resources that could give provide us with a stronger egalitarian grip on the issue. A more egalitarian reading of work could be made possible by:

- i) a retrieval of the norm of equality in recognition and autonomy elaborated by Honneth in the 80s and later abandoned; and
- ii) an extension of the domain of the sphere of equal legal rights into the sphere of achievement.

With regards to (i), I showed earlier that a normative idea of equality is present in Honneth’s article of 1982, “Moral Consciousness and Class Domination”. There, unequal access to social dignity through work and unequal autonomy in the workplace are presented as key issues at stake in moral conflicts at work. Developing and expanding on the intuitions of that article could allow us to reframe the normative problem of work so as to include concerns of contributive inequality. However, this idea is not really developed by Honneth, who eventually abandons it for a theory of recognition where injustices are to be found in the obstacles to positive identity formation. A possible development of that idea of egalitarian recognition will emerge in Chapter IV, in the discussion of *social equality*.

ii) The idea of equality reemerges in *The Struggle for Recognition* in the second sphere of recognition, which concerns equal legal rights. There, Honneth emphasizes the contrast between an egalitarian recognition of rights and an individualized recognition of achievement. The difference between equality and recognition is key in distinguishing the two spheres, in that it is precisely the need to be recognized for one’s irreducible uniqueness that motivates

¹⁰⁵ “When asked, “What is the toughest part of your job”, they answered almost to a man in the spirit of this quotation: “Garbage. Often the stuff is sloppy and smelly. (...) The toughest part? It’s the messing up in front of the garbage incinerator. That the most miserable thing there is on this job. The tenants don’t cooperate – them bastards. You tell them today, and tomorrow there is the same mess over again by the incinerator” (Hughes 2017 [1958]50).

the emergence of the third sphere from the second. Nonetheless, given that it is in the third sphere that work is considered, such a contrast is at risk of failing to present work as the realm of inequality and hierarchy, with no resources for a more egalitarian understanding of its organization. This is why in 2003 Honneth adjusts this account of achievement.

In *Redistribution or Recognition?* he corrects and counterbalances the inegalitarian nature of achievement by introducing the notion of welfare equality within the third sphere. He highlights that, historically, the development of welfare allows the members of society “to be guaranteed a minimum of social status and hence economic resources independently of the meritocratic recognition principle” (Honneth 2003, 147). The emergence of the welfare state associated with the “capitalist recognition order”, entails “the penetration of the principle of equal legal treatment into the previously autonomous sphere of social esteem” (Honneth 2003, 149). A sort of sufficientarian material equality, thus, enters the third sphere of recognition correcting its inegalitarian outcomes since unequal achievement cannot entirely justify unequal distributions – there must be a limit. Basic material equality therefore provides a sort of material threshold under which no one can fall regardless of their achievement. Distributive equality is thus supposed to counterbalance esteem inequality. However, the obvious coexistence of equality and meritocracy is not really addressed by Honneth. The tension between them perhaps requires some indication of priority: which should be privileged in case of conflict? As Fraser has compellingly stressed, Honneth leaves us with no tools regarding “what we should do in cases where esteeming the labor contributions of some entails denying equal citizenship to others” (Fraser 2003, 228).

Another possible way to correct the inegalitarian outcomes of the achievement principle may lie in the qualitatively different idea of *respect*. A sort of *baseline of unconditional respect* may counterbalance differential, conditional esteem. This would entail that *rankings of “achieved esteem” not be translated into rankings of respect* (Runciman 1967; Fourie 2015). After all, respect is not something that can be “achieved”: it is simply due to all. According to this reading, acceptable social inequalities in the division of labor may include the different levels of esteem accorded to different displays of excellence, provided that they are not actually different levels of respect. As Michael Walzer puts it, “the practice of respecting oneself isn’t a competitive practice” (Walzer 1983, 258): respect should not be seen as involved in the competitive nature of esteem. Walzer distinguishes between the minimal respect (“simple recognition”) due to all as a matter of moral requirement, and the “recognition as this or that”. Others have proposed a distinction between “honor as virtue” and “honor as status” (Lazzeri 2016). The idea of a baseline of respect may thus be better understood as a *recognition of potentiality of esteem*: “we have to acknowledge that every person we meet is at least a potential recipient of honor and admiration (...). The phrase, “Call me mister”, stakes a claim, not to any particular degree of honor, but to the possibility of honor” (Walzer 1983, 258). However, Fourie raises the point that it is not merely when inequalities of esteem turn into disrespect that we should be morally concerned by them (Fourie 2015). Indeed, there are cases in which inequalities of esteem are objectionable *even* if they are not turned into disrespect: for instance, in cases in which people are made to feel inferior, or when inequalities in esteem interfere with civic friendship (Fourie 2015). There are thus reasons, in her view, to reduce certain harmful hierarchies of esteem.

To be sure, inequalities in esteem based on the excellence (or otherwise) of one’s contributions are not themselves objectionable (and hardly eliminable, even if that were desirable), for they seem to be inherent traits of human societies, given that humans are

“evaluative animals” (Treiman 1977, 19). It makes little sense to say that the esteem we give to Gustave Flaubert or Marcel Proust for having written exceptional works is normatively problematic. As Fabian Schuppert compellingly stresses:

Generally speaking, from the viewpoint of social equality not all differences in esteem are objectionable. Differences in esteem are an unavoidable part of human societies. In fact, by its very nature, esteem seems to be somewhat inegalitarian, since esteeming a person means singling out that person above and beyond others. In other words, esteem is a positional good. However, while some differences in esteem are compatible with social equality, others are not. (Schuppert 2015, 121)

According to Schuppert, thus, social inequality based on esteem is objectionable only when achievement turns into “fixed differences in status and influence”, that is, into “the right(s) of the socially superior” (Schuppert 2015, 121). Esteem should not turn into privilege nor be stigmatizing.

However, that a baseline of respect might compensate for the inegalitarian outcomes of social esteem may not be the last word on the subject. A more demanding view, placed between the baseline of respect and social esteem for excellence, may be elaborated. This idea may lie in social equality. I will develop this point in Chapter IV.

Thus, to recapitulate the elements addressed so far, the achievement principle may be reformulated as follows: *all should be allowed to enjoy social esteem for their contributions, independently from the levels of prestige of their occupation, and provided that differential esteem does not turn into privilege and disrespect.* However, this sentence represents occupational prestige as a pre-given, socially fixed reality that lies outside of the scope of normative debate, taking prestige hierarchies for granted. Occupational prestige should rather be understood as something liable to renegotiation and debate. Therefore, the formula could be modified as follows: *all individuals should be allowed to enjoy social esteem for their contribution, and the scales of occupational prestige should be publicly acknowledged as independent from individuals’ actual contributions and deconstructed, but this is so provided that differential esteem does not turn into privilege and disrespect.* The first formulation can be considered as “affirmative”, in that it does not call into question the very logic of prestige hierarchy, but is confined to lightening some of its undesirable consequences. The second formulation is “transformative”, in that it points to the very core of prestige allocation, revealing its fundamentally arbitrary nature.

In conclusion, limiting the inegalitarian outcomes of esteem at work may thus entail: (1) retrieving and further elaborating the egalitarian notion of recognition first proposed in the 80s by Honneth and later abandoned (see Chapter IV); (2) expanding the scope of equality internal to the third sphere of recognition beyond sufficientarian material equality; (3) distinguishing between differential esteem for excellence and equal respect for all as potential recipients of our esteem; and (4) introducing an idea of equality more demanding and substantive than one which applies only to respect (see Chapter IV). Note that the idea of social dignity elaborated in the 80s may provide the seeds for these purposes: it means more than “mere” equal respect formalistically understood, in that it has a more substantive meaning and takes a critical stance against inequalities of standing rooted in occupational hierarchies.

1.4.8. *Contributive Justice Test*

The discussion has led to the conclusion that the *Leistungsprinzip* is not satisfying for a conception of labor justice. It does not meet the social interdependence condition, in that it is centered on the individual experience of work in a competitive shape that rationalizes social inequalities, with a relatively weak involvement of the social division of labor and its inequalities. Its relationship with pragmatic pluralism is linked to the pluralism of values in the interpretation of what counts as “achievement”, but it implicitly values a specific lifestyle – one which places an emphasis on achievement – over others. As for multidimensionality: on the one hand, it does not meet the normative differentiation condition, in that it sees recognition as the mediator of material goods; on the other hand, it counterbalances inequalities in achievement by integrating into it a distributive form of equality in the third sphere of recognition. Ultimately, the multidimensionality condition is not met, because distribution is understood only in terms of recognition. This concept, thus, provides few resources for a satisfying conception of labor justice.

Work and Recognition	Normative Differentiation /Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Internal Justice
Achievement Principle	/	/	/	/

1.5. *From Individual Achievement to Social Cooperation: Work as Social Integration*

In 2010, Honneth revises his conception of work. The stress is no longer on self-development as in the externalization model, nor on unequal distribution of social dignity and autonomy, nor on meritocratic achievement. From the subjectivist considerations developed earlier, the focus now shifts to concerns for social integration. *Work as a means of social integration* is the normative concept of work embraced in the last phase of Honneth’s intellectual path. The old project of the 80s of giving a “critical conception of work”, later abandoned, now returns, but in considerably different shape. In his article “Work and Recognition: A Redefinition” (2010), Honneth argues that the romantic ideal of autonomous work represented by the aesthetics of craftsmanship, defended in the first normative concept of work, turns out to be outdated for it can no longer provide the ground for a critical conception of work. Structures of work have changed so as to impede a “holistic work experience” – labor is “determined by others, fragmented and independent of their own initiative” – so that arguing for a critical revival of the ideal of craftsmanship would provide only an “external criticism” of current structures of work. The normative concept of work as self-transformation is thus rejected as anachronistic by Honneth himself, given that craftsmanship and artistic production intended as paradigms of “nonalienated, self-initiated activity” ultimately failed to affect the organization of labor; they had no impact on workers’ struggles for taking control of their work conditions – such “nineteenth-century workers utopias (...) were too weakly linked to the demands of economically organized labor”. From the model of self-determined production, thus, the focus

shifts towards a critical conception of work capable of “immanent criticism” in order to prevent him from finding himself again falling under the utopian register of “mere wishes”¹⁰⁶.

Therefore, in order to avoid normative arbitrariness and to maintain the critical power for immanent critique, it is to the existing forms of the organization of work that the theory must point. However, all of this presupposes a different perspective on the capitalist labor market than the purely instrumentalist one of economic efficiency (as in Habermas’ writing): work and the market should be seen as having a function of *social integration*. This function constitutes “the normative basis of the modern organization of work” and the moral norms already operating in the market, and thus it is to Hegel and Durkheim that Honneth now turns his attention.

According to Hegel, market-mediated work fulfils an integrative function in that it turns individual selfishness into a willingness to work in order to meet the needs of others. At the same time, each person who contributes to the common good (through work) expects a return which can ensure their economic subsistence¹⁰⁷. Honneth interprets Hegel’s reflections on the new market system in *The Philosophy of Right* as requiring two conditions: “first, it must provide a minimum wage; second, it must be apparent that all instances of labour represent a contribution to the common good” (Honneth 2010). These conditions should be understood as a “counterfactual basis” for the contemporary organization of labor¹⁰⁸. Nonetheless, Hegel’s compensatory measures are not adequate because corporations no longer offer a viable solution and cannot respond to the loss of quality of labor lived by many workers in current times. This is why Honneth turns to Durkheim, who is interested in whether economic organizations can create a feeling of community and belonging in people. This very question supposes that Durkheim does not embrace instrumentalist views of the economic dimension: some kind of normativity needs to be supposed, which thus fits Honneth’s intentions. According to Durkheim in *La division du travail social* (1967 [1893]), a sense of belonging to community is provided by the social division of labor as an “organic form of solidarity” which, according to Honneth, mobilizes a concept of recognition:

Although Durkheim does not use the term ‘recognition’, the core of his argument can easily be rendered with its help: market-mediated relations give rise to social relations in which the members of society are able to form a particular, ‘organic’ form of solidarity, because the reciprocal

¹⁰⁶ Honneth dwells on some methodological problems that his idea of immanent criticism can entail: namely, the legitimacy of generalizing the normative demands of a group. In his earlier work, Honneth indeed argued that the daily practices of resistance realized by workers proved their demand for an alternative configuration of work, and precisely for control over their work: “I was convinced that the mere fact that employees constantly undertook subversive efforts to gain control over their work provided enough evidence to justify demands for self-control in the workplace” (Honneth 2010, 227). This account of course would have an immanent character, for it would be grounded on the real experience of workers in their daily activity. Nonetheless, Honneth takes seriously the criticism by Habermas that it is a “genetically false conclusion” that of justifying a generalized norm from the desires of some particular groups. Honneth now acknowledges that Habermas was right. In order to develop a normative point of view on the organization of labor, it is necessary to contrast the idea that the capitalist labor market can be regarded only from the perspective of economic efficiency. This requires Honneth to distance himself both from Habermas, who believed that no moral norms were to be found in the instrumental reason, and to Karl Polanyi, who interpreted the economic realm as disembedded from the moral world and thus completely dominated by the logic of the market. This, however, does not match reality, for the market, in order to function, has to ground itself on a number of moral norms that, if they were not operational, would seriously affect its functioning.

¹⁰⁷ “In order to emphasize the moral significance of these internal preconditions, Hegel coined the term ‘recognition’: in the system of market-mediated exchange, subjects mutually recognize each other as private autonomous beings who act for each other and thereby sustain their livelihood through the contribution their labour makes to society” (Honneth 2010).

¹⁰⁸ “What is needed is not an appeal to a realm of higher values or universal principles, but the mobilization of those implicit norms that constitute conditions of understanding and acceptance entrenched in the modern labour market. Social movements that have fought against unreasonable wages or the de-qualification of their professions would in principle only need to make use of the moral vocabulary already found in Hegel’s analysis” (Honneth 2010).

recognition of their respective contributions to the common good gives them a sense of being connected to each other. (Honneth 2010)

In Durkheim's view, solidaristic bonds are possible only if the organization of labor meets the condition that all workers experience their work as part of a general cooperative effort for the common good, and "this requires that the cooperative connection between subjects' own activity and that of their fellow workers must be made clearly visible from the perspective of each individual task" (Honneth 2010). That is, the very idea of collective cooperation has consequences on the nature and the quality of the tasks themselves, which should be complex and demanding enough so that each worker can experience a "meaningful connection" with her work and that of others. According to Honneth, in Durkheim's thought one can find the basis for a normative justification of meaningful work. Therefore, Honneth can conclude that "the functioning of the market depends on the fulfilment of moral promises that are to be described with terms such as 'self-respect', 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work' and 'meaningful work'" (Honneth 2010).

This conclusion is particularly interesting in that it reveals an evolution in Honneth's conception of work. We are now far from the externalization model, as well as from the *Leistungsprinzip*. The perspective seems to no longer be restricted to recognition, for self-respect comes with fair pay and meaningful work – recognition monism is at least implicitly acknowledged as insufficient when it comes to work. In Honneth's late conception of work, a more inclusive and internally articulated view is thus developed. Indeed, while at the beginning his account of work did not take into special consideration the idea of material security, that is, the distributive side of recognition, after *Redistribution or Recognition?* he integrates the sphere of distributive demands into his representation of work and recognition. Not only is he aware that fairness at work cannot be detached completely from economic justice, he also represents economic justice as an internal part of the dynamics of recognition itself.

The stress in the last phase of his thought thus shifts *from achievement to solidaristic cooperation*. Recall that solidarity was included in the third sphere of recognition in his 1992 book. Its relationship with recognition as achievement was problematic. Besides problems of theoretical compatibility, it seemed to play a relatively marginal, and in any case rather under-determined role in that framework. In the last writings, however, solidarity becomes central to the ways in which recognition structures the division of labor.

Besides the work of Hegel and Durkheim, the fourth normative conception of work also reflects some of Honneth's writings published in the 90s devoted to the work of John Dewey. In the article "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation" (1998), Honneth points to Dewey's work as a potential model of democracy alternative to the prevailing paradigms – namely the republican and the procedural models of democracy. Dewey's innovation is in relying upon the resources already present in society to conceptualize democracy, such as the actual state of the social division of labor. Even before entering the democratic arena, members of society *already cooperate* with one another in the social division of labor: it is there, then, that one should look for the resources of democracy. The accent on the issue of democracy highlights the same point later developed when referencing Hegel and Durkheim: the idea of work as a key resource for the integration of society. Note that in this phase, Honneth talks about the "organization of labor". He no longer restricts his view to the individual experience of work. This marks a relevant evolution in his reading of the problem.

The stress on social integration within the institutional framework on work, beyond the subjectivistic readings of the first phase and the shortcomings of the achievement principle, is also developed in the more recent work *Freedom's Right* (2014), in which Honneth substantively modifies his tripartite conception of recognition. The second sphere of recognition no longer relates to equal legal rights, but rather to market interactions. The merit principle is replaced with an idea of solidaristic cooperation in the division of labor. It is particularly significant, thus, that Honneth abandons the merit principle that raised so many problems. The reason for doing so is that recognition for professional achievement and social status has been ideologically distorted so as to become no longer acknowledgeable (Honneth 2011). In this way, Honneth eventually escapes the problems entailed by the achievement principle discussed in the previous paragraphs, one of which was the attempt to consolidate the values of solidarity and meritocracy. Given the tension between them, it was hard to see not only how they could stand together, but also in what sense the sphere of social esteem could include both of them without falling prey to paradox.

This normative concept of work has the merit of avoiding the shortcomings of a merely subjective account of the experience of work, acknowledging the normative relevance of the social interdependence of each contribution within the division of labor. However, this advantage comes with costs. Firstly, it is at risk of reducing the investigation of work to the level of the social interaction, as Jean-Philippe Deranty has remarked, and thus reproducing in another form the intersubjective turn of Habermas (Deranty 2009). Secondly, even if the fulfillment of the social interdependence condition positively opens up possibilities for a conception of labor justice, it nonetheless provides a *merely horizontal* account of the social interdependence of the division of labor. No surprise that this was also the problem with Durkheim's account: vertical interdependence is not conceptualized, and domination and oppressive inequalities in the division of labor are not sufficiently represented.

When understood descriptively, the stress on cooperation provides an unrealistic account of how the division of labor is currently structured. Understood normatively, it has romantic expectations of philanthropic cooperative motivations in the actors that ultimately subsumes the demands of labor justice under a paternalistic ideal. It does not help to address structures of domination and inequalities in the division of labor. Thus, the social interdependence condition should also include vertical concerns and avoid paternalism. Otherwise, it conveys the questionable idea that the division of labor is merely a matter of the cooperative division of tasks and is not subject to concerns of contributive inequality and domination.

1.5.1. *Contributive Justice Test*

The unequal division of dirty work may be addressed by this model as a form of division of labor that does not embody ideals of solidarity and cooperation. If we understand what we ought contribute to social cooperation in solidaristic terms, then dirty work represents a problem that concerns us all, not just the least advantaged social groups. We are to redress such inequality on the basis of reasons of human solidarity, and find strategies that help to foster the feeling of connection with others. However, this response necessarily relies on a common conception of the good that is not consistent with the pragmatic pluralism condition. Simply put, fairness in the distribution of dirty work should not rely on contingent and particularistic feelings of solidarity, rather it should be a matter of justice and of political

equality (see Rawls 2001; Walzer 1983). Indeed, in this model there is the implicit risk that strategies to ameliorate the situation of dirty workers will be taken as an expression of human benevolence, which will not be expected of all human beings, and which addresses the problem as one of charity and philanthropy rather than one of justice, due to persons simply *as moral equals*. Moreover, such an ideal is too vague, and does not really help us understand the direction that a normative response should take to redress the situations of dirty workers.

To be sure, this concept of work satisfies the social interdependence condition, because it crucially develops the idea of the connections between workers in the social division of labor beyond the atomistic or merely intra-psychic accounts of the earlier models. It does not restrict the focus to the individual experience of work: this, however, comes at the cost of losing sight of contributive inequalities and their effects on individual experiences of work. As for pragmatic pluralism, we find a precise ethos in Honneth's account of the division of labor as social integration, an idea that traces back to individuals' participation in a common good and a sense of solidarity that is at risk of underestimating or not fully addressing structural injustice. The idea of social integration, thus, meets the relational and contributive dimensions, but only weakly addresses the distributive.

Work and Recognition	Normative Differentiation /Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Internal Justice
Work as Social Integration	/	x (horizontal)	/	/

2. The Evolution of Honneth's Conception of Work

All the normative concepts of work identified thus far involve a different interpretation of the concept of recognition at work. Recognition is analyzed in different ways, which can be summed up in the following typology:

- *Self-transformative recognition;*
- *Egalitarian recognition;*
- *Meritocratic recognition; and*
- *Solidaristic recognition.*

To these concepts, I have added *occupational prestige* as an *ascribed* form of recognition essentially different from earned esteem and which pre-emptively circumscribes (or expands, depending on one's position) the social setting within which individuals must work to enjoy esteem. Note that the differences between these concepts are relevant because they affect different domains and subjects. Work as self-transformation concerns the sphere of the *individual experience of work*. Work as equal dignity and autonomy concerns the sphere of *contributive inequalities*. Work as achievement concerns *the relationship between the worker and the community*. Work as social integration has to do with the broader sphere of *social cooperation*. For instance, the psychological dimension of work cannot be conflated with that of the social division of labor, even though they are of course connected in relevant ways. Different aspects of recognition are stressed by each concept.

Each corresponds to a specific and distinct normative concept of labor. The scheme below shows which concept of recognition is involved in each normative model of work:

Recognition at work: a typology	Normative concepts of work		Scales / subjects
Self-transformative recognition	Work as expressive and formative self-transformation	Expressive and formative self-transformation through the objectification of one's capacities in the product of one's labor (externalization)	Psychological/ individual experience of work
Egalitarian recognition	Equal social dignity and autonomy at work	Having equal access to socially esteemed occupations and to autonomy regardless of one's social class	Social/ occupational structures and social classes
Meritocratic recognition	Work as achievement	Enjoying social esteem for one's unique abilities	Institutional/ individual and the community
Occupational prestige	Occupational prestige	Enjoying social prestige for one's occupation	Occupational hierarchy/ ladder of labor value
Solidaristic recognition	Work as social integration	Recognizing other workers as valuable contributors to the social good	Societal / social cooperation as a whole

Some of the concepts are in tension with one another, or even strictly incompatible. Meritocratic and solidaristic recognition, for instance, can hardly stand together. The same could be said of meritocratic recognition and occupational prestige – as I argued earlier, occupational prestige is in reality an ascribed form of esteem, which traces back to corporative patterns of social honor, which is incompatible with achieved esteem. Other concepts may be considered as potentially complementary – for example, egalitarian and solidaristic recognition; and self-transformative and meritocratic recognition. Alternative combinations of the concepts may be envisaged, even though some seem to not be meaningfully comparable: for instance, self-transformative recognition as in the externalization model seems to hardly be *comparable* to occupational prestige, because they refer to essentially different phenomena – a comparative assessment of their compatibility would make little sense. A critique of existing labor relations could benefit from these different concepts of recognition at work, because each may point to distinct critiques and counterfactually to a positive relation to the self.

These concepts of recognition mirror the evolution of Honneth's conception of work, where some significant shifts can be identified. First, it is clear that Honneth progressively shifts from a Marxian framework to a Hegelian one. This can be observed, for instance, in that the "subject of emancipation" is no longer the working class, but potentially any subject (individual or collective). In the transition, Honneth considers the externalization model of self-transformation through work and contributive inequalities at different stages, and Marxian accents are developed within increasingly Hegelian frameworks. Second, he ends up acknowledging that the principle of achievement is inadequate for a satisfying normative account of work. Understood as the only tool required in a normative discourse on work, it

has limited normative potential and is inherently liable to ideological distortion. Third, and strictly related to the second point, he shifts from the idea of work as a subjective experience to a perspective which focuses on the societal virtues of the social division of labor. The accent is no longer on individual esteem but on the dynamics of recognition that make the labor market work, thereby developing his early intuitions on the morality behind market practices, against instrumentalist or reductively economic readings. Honneth thus moves from a focus on the subjective psychology of work to the social interdependencies of work. Despite these developments, Honneth’s approach maintains a number of elements throughout the changes in his thought: indeed, there is a normative core that persists in Honneth’s framework. This core involves (1) the idea that normativity concerns the pursuit of the good life, as opposed to liberal ideas of justice (self-realization); and (2) the idea that the main standpoint from which to normatively assess the world investigates people’s positive relations to their selves and thus their healthy identity formation (identity).

Among these developments, what can be retained for a conception of labor justice? Which normative concept of work is best suited to addressing pressing normative conflicts of work? In order to answer these questions, let us first recapitulate the critical observations made for each family of concepts, using the conditions that I recognized earlier as guiding frameworks (normative differentiation, social interdependence, pragmatic pluralism, multidimensionality). Let us then ask whether the four normative concepts of work identified meet the conditions needed for a conception of labor justice.

Normative concept of work	Social Interdependence		Normative Differentiation/ Multidimensionality	Pragmatic Pluralism
	Horizontal	Vertical		
Self-Development	/	/	/	/
Equal Social Dignity and Autonomy	X	X	X	X
Individual Achievement	/	/	/	X
Social Integration	X	/	/	/

Among these concepts of work, the most satisfying conception of labor justice is offered by the model of equal social dignity and autonomy. If properly amended so as to abandon moral essentialism, it could serve as a fruitful basis to be used to reframe labor justice in terms of a counterfactual idea of contributive equality. However, it is striking that most critical literature has focused on the model of self-transformation proposed by the early Honneth.

Indeed, in the literature, there seems to be a wide preference for the externalization model proposed by the early Honneth, which has not passed our contributive justice test. For instance, Nicholas Smith and Jean-Philippe Deranty have argued for a retrieval of the project of a “critical conception of work” in terms of formative and expressive self-transformation. Whereas Smith critiques Honneth for the shortcomings of the achievement principle, Deranty is unsatisfied with the “reductive” conception of labor as social interaction (Smith 2009;

Deranty 2009)¹⁰⁹. They aim to bring work back to the core of critical theory, pointing to the externalization model with the support of the psychodynamics of work as elaborated by Christophe Dejours (1998) and Yves Clot (1999). In fact, in the French debate, Honneth's intuitions have been developed in some detail, giving rise to a study area on work in terms of recognition (Deranty 2007; Deranty et al. 2007; Renault 2007; 2016; Smith 2009; Seglow 2009; Dejours and Deranty 2010; Smith and Deranty 2001; Connolly 2016; Boston 2018). These readings point to the philosophical centrality of work, understood as a domain crucial for self-realization and recognition, and consider together resources from social psychology and psychoanalysis within the framework of critical theory. Some of the above authors have attempted to "politicize" Honneth's idea of recognition, showing its "embedded" character in organizations and social practices (Renault). Nonetheless, they do not aim to work from a perspective of justice, considering any model of justice *à la* Rawls as indicative of a sort of methodological arrogance (Renault 2016). It is the people, not the philosopher, who should formulate a view of justice, because there can't be any view of justice that does not come from one's lived experience (Renault 2017; 2017). Note that these approaches, which we could refer to as representing *the critical theory of work*, address work in terms of self-realization, in a way that does not meet the pragmatic pluralism condition.

I don't agree that the externalization model is the best way to develop a critical conception of work. If it is true that the social interaction model has limited scope to account for the internal features of work, nonetheless the limitations of a subjectivistic perspective should not be neglected. As I argued earlier, the subjective model does not meet the social interdependence and pragmatic pluralism conditions of labor justice.

And yet, no one seems to be interested in the barely developed model of equal social dignity and autonomy at work. It seems to be this model, however, that could overcome the *autonomy without equality* barrier, by integrating an idea of equality into a normative account of work which has been thus far lacking. The development of Honneth's thought shows that he abandons an egalitarian conception of work for identarian and socially cohesive concerns. Thus I argue that, if adequately reframed, that model could serve as a fruitful basis for the relational dimension of labor justice. In order for this to be possible, however, the "barriers" identified should be overcome. As I will show in the next chapter, contemporary debates on equality and justice may provide useful resources for doing so.

3. The Problem With Recognition Monism

Before concluding, it is important to consider for a moment a more general aspect of Honneth's thought, which has considerable consequences for his representation of work: recognition monism. Let us first note that the multidimensionality/normative differentiation condition is lacking in Honneth's framework in a quite *specular way to distributive theories*. To recall, in

¹⁰⁹ "In the mature model of the ethics of recognition (...) work is normatively discussed, but from the point of view of its social meaning, that is, inasmuch as subjects experience a specific kind of social recognition through their place in the division of labour. The problem with this new approach to work, via the concept of recognition, is that many of the other normative elements that were still present in Marx and which the early 1980 article had well identified are now missing, namely all the normative aspects of the subject and society's "metabolism with nature", those elements of social labour that are beyond the social relations between producers and consumers. In other words, the correction of the reductive view of interaction in the theory of social labour itself leads to a reductive view of labour, when it is solely interpreted through the lens of intersubjective interaction. Once again, we are pointing here towards some of the detrimental consequences of the intersubjectivistic turn. The truncated view of work as a normative experience can be traced back to the reductive concept of interaction that Honneth operates with by focusing on recognition" (Deranty 2009, 49-50).

Chapters I and II I highlighted the limits to scope of the distributive perspective when it comes to labor justice as encapsulated in the *derivative* thesis, which was the idea that work could become fair merely by intervening in the redistribution of goods and resources. I argued that distribution should be considered as one dimension among others in an account of labor justice, rather than an all-encompassing paradigm, because redistribution fails to address the relational, political and contributive dimensions, which are essentially misconstrued as distributive issues.

Likewise, *the one-dimensionality of Honneth's recognition paradigm may be considered as comparable to that of the distributive view*. The specular version of the distributive *derivative* thesis can be identified in *recognition monism*: according to Axel Honneth, all social and political demands can be traced back to the common motivational source of recognition (Honneth 2003). In Honneth's view, distributive struggles themselves are embraced by oppressed peoples to find sources of social dignity and self-respect: "even the "material" inequalities (...) must be interpretable as expressing the violation of well-founded claims to recognition" (Honneth 2003, 134)¹¹⁰. If social recognition mediates people's access to distributive goods, then questions of redistribution can ultimately be reduced to questions of recognition. For example, in *Redistribution or Recognition?* the achievement principle is said to mediate people's access to distributive goods as a legitimating principle of material inequality¹¹¹. To be sure, the risks of a similar conception are soon acknowledged by Honneth, who complements the recognitive-distributive rule of achievement with an egalitarian rule of material equality, including both of them in the third sphere of recognition. The highly inegalitarian outcomes of achievement thus end up being counterbalanced by a sufficientarian-like idea of welfare equality¹¹². Note that this egalitarian correction of the third sphere is distributive in character (Honneth 2003, 149). The welfare state alters the way in which distribution is ensured: the achievement principle is no longer the sole criterion, and it must be complemented with a minimum of material equality. In Honneth's view, distributive struggles themselves derive from the more fundamental struggle for recognition. These struggles take two main forms: the struggle for recognition regardless of achievement (*distributive equality*), and the struggle for recognition of one's irreducible difference (*individual achievement*). Two distinct distributive dynamics are thus at play in the third sphere of recognition: one directed towards particularistic appropriation of resources, and one directed towards material equality.

Therefore, in Honneth's account, recognition (as achievement) and distribution interact in two ways, which may be referred to as *justificatory* and *counterbalancing*. The justificatory (or ideological) relation between them lies in the idea that unequal social esteem provides public justification to unequal material compensations¹¹³. The counterbalancing relation between

¹¹⁰ "Even questions of distributive justice are better understood in terms of normative categories that come from a sufficiently differentiated theory of recognition" (Honneth 2003, 126).

¹¹¹ "For the time being the individualist achievement principle is also the one normative resource bourgeois-capitalist society provides for morally justifying the extremely unequal distribution of life chances and goods. If social esteem as well as economic and legal privileges can no longer be legitimately governed by membership in a certain estate, then the ethico-religious valorization of work and the establishment of a capitalist market suggest making social esteem dependent on individual achievement. To this extent, the achievement principle henceforth forms the backdrop of normative legitimation which, in case of doubt, has to provide rational grounds for publicly justifying the privileged appropriation of particular resources like money or credentials" (Honneth 2003, 148-149).

¹¹² "With the construction of the social-welfare state, the principle of equal legal treatment made its way into the sphere of achievement-based esteem" (Honneth 2003, 188).

¹¹³ As Andrew Sayer puts it, "statements of equal recognition may therefore be confirmed or contradicted through distribution"; and "distributional inequalities are commonly (mis)read as reflecting differences in individual worth" (Sayer 2011, 90-91).

them lies in the idea that excessive inequalities and appropriations thus legitimated are counterbalanced by material equality. Overall, distribution is presented as an outcome of recognition, or as purely functional to recognition.

3.2. *Labor Justice as Recognition? Against Recognition Monism*

This distributive egalitarian correction of the third sphere does not question contributive inequality. Honneth's monism even extends to the structuration itself of the division of labor: besides determining the distributive sphere, *recognition is also said to be the very source of the division of labor*. In Honneth's words, even "the social demarcation of professions – indeed, the shape of the social division of labor as a whole" results from the "cultural valuation of specific capacities for achievement" (Honneth 2003, 154). That is, *recognition is presumed to explain and normatively shape not only the sphere of distribution, but also the sphere of contribution*. The normative differentiation condition is thus not met at all. All the spheres trace back to the overarching dimension of recognition.

An example of the thesis that recognition itself structures the division of labor can be found when Honneth considers social prejudices about women's capacities:

An examination of the relevant research quickly shows that the undervaluing of predominantly female professions is not due to the actual content of the work. Rather, it is the other way around: every professionalized activity automatically falls in the social status hierarchy as soon as it is primarily practiced by women, while there is a gain in status if the gender reversal goes the other way. Gender functions here in the organization of the social division of labor as a cultural measure that determines the social esteem owed a particular activity independent of the specificity of the work. Only this cultural mechanism, the (naturalistically grounded) denigration of female capacities for achievement, can explain how it is that, on bourgeois-capitalist society's understanding of its own premises, the *de facto* women's activities of housework and childcare do not conceptually register as "work" at all. And the same mechanism must be invoked to explain why there is always a pronounced loss of status when a profession shifts from male to female. *All this shows how much the legitimation of the social distribution order owes to cultural views of the contribution of different status groups or strata to social reproduction*. Not only which activities can be valued as "work", and hence are eligible for professionalization, but also how high the social return should be for each professionalized activity is determined by classificatory grids and evaluative schemes anchored deep in the culture of bourgeois capitalist society. If, in light of this finding, we also consider that experiences of injustice are generally sparked off by the inadequate or incomplete application of a prevailing legitimation principle, we arrive at a thesis that seems to me appropriate for interpreting distribution struggles under capitalism: such conflicts typically take the form of social groups, in response to the experience of disrespect for their actual achievements, attempting to throw the established evaluative models into question by fighting for greater esteem of their social contributions, and thereby for economic redistribution. Thus, when they do not take the form of mobilizing social rights, redistribution struggles are definitional conflicts over the legitimacy of the current application of the achievement principle. (Honneth 2003, 154, emphasis added)

Status hierarchies and differential esteem result in distributive inequalities and occupational hierarchies¹¹⁴. From Honneth's perspective, thus, *pay differentials* (the distributive-economic

¹¹⁴ "Now, this thesis's claim to universality may come as a surprise at this point, since so far I have shown how strong the influence of cultural evaluative models is on status distribution only in the case of the gendered division of labor. The feminist struggle to socially valorize "female" housework is so far the clearest example of how, within the framework of the capitalist achievement principle, social redistribution can be brought about primarily by delegitimizing prevailing assessments of achievement. When threatened by a lack of status, writes Reinhard Kreckel, women today can respond only by either themselves joining the labor market or "struggling for social recognition of their own reproductive activity within the household as equally valuable social labor". If we socially generalize this especially vivid example and make it the paradigm of distribution struggles, we arrive at the argumentative logic of most such conflicts: time and again, an already

dimension) aren't but *recognition differentials*, and the demarcations themselves between professions (contributive dimension) are the products of recognition differentials too¹¹⁵. To be sure, Honneth's account seems to be more compelling than, for instance, John Roemer's, according to which pay differentials are simply some of the outcomes of the market. Honneth correctly acknowledges that there is a fundamental status dimension that contributes to how resources are allocated in society, as in the case of pay differentials. Thus, these very important insights should not be rejected. *What is problematic is the claim that recognition can alone bear the explanatory burden for all the normative dimensions of society*. From a multidimensional perspective, Honneth's idea of achievement is supposed to explain the way resources are distributed (economic-distributive dimension), as well as to account for the normativity of work and the structuration itself of the division of labor (contributive dimension). For not only does Honneth's proposal aim to absorb distributive struggles into recognition struggles; it also reduces work to simply a matter of recognition.

In the last analysis, Honneth's concept of recognition as achievement is thus *normatively overburdened*. This principle alone is expected to explain and resolve numerous, qualitatively different problems. Achievement is expected to redress the exclusion of women from the labor market, as well as their devalued contributions in the home; to meet individuals' interests in being recognized for their unique capacities and thus to allow them to gain social esteem for their work; to explain people's pay differentials and inequalities in wealth and income; and to explain even the structuration itself of the division of labor and the social demarcation of professions. The wide multiplicity and heterogeneity of problems that recognition is expected to address alone results in what appears to be a "catchall concept" with low critical force¹¹⁶. The question thus becomes: can recognition alone redress labor injustice? I answer: being recognized for one's work certainly does not imply that there is now labor justice. If recognition alone sufficed for labor justice, it would be sufficient to provide esteem to all, even though their working conditions may be far unequal. As Nicholas Smith has stressed, "by subsuming the category of work under the category of achievement, it becomes impossible to articulate a contrast between dignified and undignified work irrespective of the social recognition the worker receives" (Smith 2009, 58).

This *recognition reductionism*, which reduces distributive-economic and contributive dimensions to the sole logic of recognition, can be identified not only at the explanatory level, but also at the normative level. If recognition is expected to *explain* pay differentials and the social demarcation of professions in the division of labor, it is also expected to *normatively* require that women be recognized for their contributions in the home through remuneration.

professionalized or even unregulated activity must be symbolically presented in a new light – a new value horizon – in order to establish that the institutionalized evaluative system is one-sided or restrictive, and thus that the established distribution order does not possess sufficient legitimacy according to its own principles. The full extent of such struggles only emerges, however, when we consider at the same time that the question of appropriate esteem for various activities is itself the stuff of everyday conflict in the reproduction of the capitalist division of labor. Whether in the industrial or the service sector, in administration or, increasingly, in the family, not only the "just" valuation but also the demarcation and connection between activities are always subject to a conflictual process of negotiation, since there is no adequate way of anchoring them in something like a value-neutral, purely "technical" functional order. And precisely to the extent that the redistribution of material goods is directly or indirectly connected to the outcomes of such conflicts, these are first and foremost distribution conflicts in the entirely unspectacular, even prepolitical sense." (Honneth 2003, 154-155)

¹¹⁵ "(...) we must also consider the cultural values involved in the institutional constitution of the economic sphere through interpretations of the achievement principle, which give it a particular shape in the form of a division of labor and a distribution of status" (Honneth 2003, 155-156).

¹¹⁶ As Nancy Fraser has put it, "Honneth overextends the category of recognition to the point that it loses its critical force" (Fraser 2003, 201).

This is the normative conclusion to be drawn from the “intermeshing of payment and respect” identified at the explanatory stage (Honneth 2003, 141). Therefore, interestingly, the normative remedy that Honneth points to as a solution to the social devaluation of women’s housework is monetary recognition (Roessler 2007). Honneth’s attempt to reduce the economic-distributive sphere to recognition leads him to the conclusion that paying women for housework would meet their normative demands, which is indeed a redistributive remedy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, paid housework is also the remedy suggested by the distributive thinker John Rawls (see Chapter I). To recall, in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Rawls responds to feminist criticisms which hold that there is a lack of adequate consideration given to gendered housework in *A Theory of Justice*, by arguing that women should be paid for their housework, or that they should take a share from their husbands’ salaries. In this way, Rawls, a distributive author, and Honneth, an advocate of recognition, both of whom tend to present their respective views as mutually exclusive, end up converging on the same remedy to the contributive injustice suffered by women. Both authors claim that the gendered division of labor should be redressed through monetary compensation – that is, *distributively*. The reasons they give for this conclusion are, however, different. Rawls believes that the social basis of self-respect should be provided by goods and resources allocated distributively. Honneth believes that the “intermeshing of payment and respect” makes distribution an expression of underlying matters of recognition. Notwithstanding the different reasons they offer, neither Rawls nor Honneth – that is, neither the distributive nor the recognition paradigms of justice – are really of help when it comes to issues of justice in the division of labor (for similar conclusions see also Beate Roessler 2007; Iris Marion Young 2007). What is lacking in both accounts are tools to make the division of labor fairer between the sexes (in this case) and, more broadly, within society, beyond considerations of pay. They provide distributive answers to contributive questions.

The *derivative thesis* of distributive models and *recognition monism* of recognition theory thus look to be two sides of the same coin, which we may call normative monism, or one-dimensionality. Just as distributive theorists make recognition a sort of collateral by-product of distribution, Honneth reduces distributive issues to patterns of recognition within a relationship of pure functionality, which reflects the overarching normative prominence of recognition. The problem is that, taken alone, distribution and recognition alone do not seem to suffice when it comes to labor justice, because there are irreducible contributive norms to be addressed in their own right (see Chapter V). Normative conflicts within households do not merely turn around the amounts of money that members of the family receive; they also include disagreements about the ways in which members contribute to the running of the household (see Sayer 2011, 92).

I am defending here the thesis of the normative irreducibility of the contributive dimension to both the relational and distributive dimensions. I offer the following reasons to justify this thesis:

i) *Recognition as explanation.*

In Honneth’s framework, recognition is presented as an all-encompassing paradigm, under which the economy and the way labor is structured can be subsumed. Yet it is hard to believe that the global structures of the capitalist economy and the division of labor are the product of psychological dynamics of recognition. Economic configurations follow their own logic,

rooted in social structures, economic institutions, social practices and norms irreducible to people's psychologies (Fraser 2003; see also Sayer 2005; 2011; Renault 2017; 2017). Consider, for instance,

(...) the supply and demand for different types of labor; the balance of power between labor and capital; the stringency of social regulations, including the minimum wage; the availability and cost of productivity enhancing technologies; the ease with which firms can shift their operations to locations where wage rates are lower; the cost of credit; the terms of trade; and international currency exchange rates. (Fraser 2003, 215)¹¹⁷

The distributive-economic dimension has its own specificity, and even if it is importantly intertwined with symbolic and status dimensions, it cannot be simply explanatorily *reduced* to them.

Distributional inequalities in capitalism are to a significant degree subject to forces which are *unrelated* to matters of recognition. The market forces and the capitalist strategies which govern employment and pay derive mainly from the pursuit of self-interest. (...) Thus while struggles for recognition often take a distributional form, and distributional inequalities are often read as indications of worth, distribution in capitalism is far from merely consequence of differences of recognition in different groups. Class is not merely a product of "classism" (Sayer 2011, 91).

This is true also for the social division of labor and the demarcation of professions. To be sure, the way in which work is shared throughout society is significantly affected by status hierarchies and social rankings (Hughes 2017 [1958]; Dahrendorf 1972; Kantzara 2016). Nonetheless, the division of labor also has a technical dimension that should not be overlooked. The problems with this representation become clear at the normative level: if the division of labor and the demarcation of professions merely follow from cultural valuations of people's capacities, how could unfair divisions of labor be redressed? On this reading, they could be resolved by calling into question currently established standards of achievement and showing a type of contribution 'in a new light' – that is, by claiming recognition for a kind of work in the public arena. However, as I argued earlier, recognizing a type of work as equally valuable does not suffice to redress the wrongs of the division of labor. Turning back to the explanatory side, claiming that the division of labor is ultimately rooted in psychological patterns of labor value should at least require empirical justification that Honneth does not provide to support any of his statements. Moreover, the internal features of work involve a multiplicity of elements that cannot be dealt with by the idea of recognition alone.

Economic interests and the division of labor cannot be simply subsumed under recognition. For instance, it is not for mere psychological reasons that black people in the countryside of Rosarno, Italy, are paid 14 euros a day to collect oranges with no social protections while living in *simil-bidonvilles*. There are economic interests behind that pay. Migrants are so badly paid not only because their capacities are misrecognized, or because they are disrespected (which certainly is the case): they are economically exploited because it is economically convenient to do so, leading to increased profits. This is not to deny that a certain recognition dynamics is at play here. But this should not be understood as the exclusive

¹¹⁷ "(...) It follows that not all struggles over distribution are in fact struggles over recognition, aimed at enhancing esteem for the claimant's labor. (...) Consider today's struggles against neoliberal globalization. Targeting transnational trade and investment regimes that serve the interests of large corporate shareholders and currency speculators, such struggles aim to end systemic maldistribution that is rooted not in ideologies about achievement, but in the system imperatives and governance structures of globalizing capitalism" (Fraser 2003, 215).

or primary explanation of the injustice. Migrants are badly paid because it is economically rewarding for the owners, and *also* because these owners live in a society that allows them to free-ride on pre-existing social patterns of cultural exclusion and devaluation socially associated with migrants and racialized people. The one-dimensionality of recognition, just like the one-dimensionality of distribution, thus cannot be accepted because it provides only a partial account of such complex dynamics.

Note also that scholars generally sympathetic to Honneth's tradition have eventually acknowledged that recognition can neither explain nor provide a normative basis for economic dynamics (Renault 2017)¹¹⁸. Recognition should not interpret all redistributive claims as symbolic demands, overlooking their irreducible specificity. For now, let us conclude that recognition monism provides only partial explanations of economic-distributive and contributive dynamics.

ii) *Recognition as motivation.*

It is not true that all normative conflicts of labor concern the interests individuals have in being recognized. This can be easily appreciated in an immanent way, considering real people's discourses:

Arguments within work teams are often not so much about what each team member gets in terms of pay or other reward, but what each person contributes; is everyone "pulling their weight", or are some "free-riding" on the work of others? There might also be objections if some team members monopolized all the interesting and pleasant tasks, leaving the less attractive ones to others. (Sayer 2011, 92)

Normative conflicts within work teams or in the household very often concern the actual shape of the division of labor, whether it is fair or should be changed.

Aside from this, people want to be autonomous and to self-direct their activities, as empirical research has shown for a long time (Kohn and Schooler 1978). Also, they want time for leisure and for social relations. They demand access to economic resources in order to live a decent life. The motivational constellation of people at work is rich and complex. It cannot be reduced to one overarching feature.

Similar ideas have been suggested by Nancy Fraser:

It is by no means clear that daily discontent is always a matter of denied recognition. In fact, the idea that one single motivation underlies all such discontent is *prima facie* implausible. A less tendentious reading of a broader range of research sources would doubtless reveal a multiplicity of motives – including resentment of unearned privilege, abhorrence of cruelty, aversion to arbitrary power, revulsion against gross disparities of income and wealth, antipathy to exploitation, dislike of supervision, and indignation at being marginalized or excluded. (...) If these motivations *could* be subsumed under an overarching normative rubric, the latter could not be anything so determinate as the expectation that one's personal identity be recognized. Rather, it would have to be something more general, such as the expectation that one be treated fairly. (Fraser 2003, 203)

¹¹⁸ "En effet, il semble raisonnable de douter que le modèle de la reconnaissance puisse rendre adéquatement compte des formes d'injustice qui sont liées à la production et à la distribution des richesses. (...) Il faut préciser les principes au moyen desquels une théorie de la reconnaissance peut s'appliquer à la critique de l'économie politique. Il n'est pas contestable que les phénomènes économiques se caractérisent par une logique spécifique qui n'est pas du même ordre que celle de la reconnaissance" (Renault 2017, 174-175).

Despite its relevance, recognition cannot be considered as the exclusive or pre-eminent motivational source of normativity at work (see also Dubet 2013). The motivational constellation behind normative conflicts at work is multiple and heterogeneous; it cannot be traced back to a single source.

iii) *Recognition as remedy: redressing miscontribution with recognition.*

Just as recognition does not explain all the structures of work, it also does not fix all the problems involved in labor. Consider, once again, the case most cited by Honneth as representative of misrecognition of work, gendered housework. Even though care and housework were recognized as “real work”, their public recognition would not entail as such that the division of housework becomes fair. It would not necessarily provide the tools to make housework no longer a “woman’s thing”. Rather, women would be likely to continue to be the main bearers of care responsibilities (see also Roessler 2007). Let us consider another example, dirty work. Issues of social dignity and public esteem are particularly relevant to dirty workers (see for instance Lamont 2012; Newman 2009; Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). Nonetheless, providing them with a “greater share of esteem”, as it were, would not necessarily improve their situation or fully address their normative demands. If recognition of the value of their contributions were to consist just in monetary recognition (as in the case of gendered housework), this would equally be problematic. Recognition of work cannot be given merely by pay, because it is affected by the actual conditions of the job, social protections, occupational prestige, the way work is shared, who does what and for what reasons. Recognition alone cannot redress unequal divisions of labor: recognizing carework or dirty work as deserving social esteem does not make the unequal division of labor itself fairer.

Furthermore, consider that recognition alone does not have resources to prevent ideologically loaded distortions. If not accompanied by other normative resources, recognition can become an exploitative tool. The achievement principle is particularly suited to this (Kocyba 2011; Honneth 2007; Renault 2007). Giving prizes and promotions to workers that better fit the standards of performance could easily be used as a way to pay less and expect more from them. Reputational economies do not constitute examples of fairness against exploitation. The idea of remuneration through “reputational capital” which replaces money as a reward for work is particularly relevant here. One can continue being materially exploited while being socially recognized. Without a normative connection to distribution and contribution, and without some commitment to equality, recognition alone does not have tools to prevent this ideological distortion. Management-centered, up-down interpretations of recognition could be compatible with Honneth’s framework.

iv) *Against recognition monism: concluding remarks*

The normative differentiation and multidimensionality conditions are not met in Honneth’s account. *Recognition monism* should be rejected because it does not adequately account for the other dimensions involved in labor justice. More precisely, recognition monism does not meet the requirements of the following dimensions of labor justice:

- *economic-distributive;*
- *labor-contributive; and*
- *political-democratic.*

The forms of labor injustice that cannot be redressed by recognition are:

- material exploitation: injustice suffered by the materially exploited cannot be compensated by merely providing social esteem;
- powerlessness: exclusion from participation in decision-making processes concerning one's work cannot be replaced by esteem for one's contribution;
- unequal division of labor, poor quality/quantity of the tasks: injustices in unequal divisions of labor cannot be redressed by merely providing esteem.

To put it in more technical language: recognition should be considered as relatively independent to the distributive-economic, contributive and political dimensions of labor justice. This is the normative differentiation condition – a normative remedy concerning one dimension of justice should not be seen as necessarily extending to other dimensions of justice, which relies upon the idea of multidimensionality (i.e. dimensions of justice are mutually irreducible and yet deeply intertwined with one another).

Nonetheless, note that in his recent writings, Honneth himself seems to be aware of the relevance of normative multidimensionality. Interestingly, in *The Idea of Socialism* (2017), Honneth gives significance to the notion of “functional differentiation”, an expression inspired by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann as well as Michael Walzer. According to Honneth, one reason for which the idea of socialism has lost appeal in the last few decades lies in the fact that socialists have limited their idea of social freedom to the economic sphere: their “economic fundamentalism” (or “economic monism”, or “economocentrism”) was a “fatal misunderstanding”, in that they did not acknowledge the “independent moral logic of other spheres” (Honneth 2017, 76 ff.)¹¹⁹. For instance, they have reduced the sphere of private relationships to that of economic production, thereby failing to extend their concerns to the emancipation of women (Honneth 2017, 84). They should have rather extended social freedom to other spheres of life, which they fail to do because of “the inability to adapt the groundbreaking concept of social freedom to the reality of a functionally differentiated society, making it impossible to apply this concept to gradually separated spheres” (Honneth 2017, 76). What should be done, according to Honneth, is not merely to replace the economocentrism of socialism with an idea of “independent spheres of action which obey independent norms”. Rather, one should also give place to an idea “of how these normatively differentiated spheres should be related to each other in the future” (Honneth 2017, 87).

Honneth's recognition monism looks to be philosophically distant from these words. In 2017, Honneth looks to be a new advocate of the idea of multidimensionality. Interestingly, his critical target here is socialist economism – as in Walzer's “Liberalism as the Art of Separation” (1987) – and *not* recognition monism. Yet the same arguments he considers against economism may be turned against his own views: after all, isn't it true also for recognition monism that it should give place to other spheres of differentiation without

¹¹⁹ “(...) none of the early socialists were willing to recognize the gradual functional differentiation of modern societies. Trapped entirely within the spirit of industrialism, and thus convinced that a future socialist society would be determined exclusively by the sphere of industrial production, they saw no reason to consider the existent or desirable independence of social spheres of action. This refusal to even consider a process of functional differentiation also explains why socialists made no effort to apply the idea of social freedom to other spheres of action. If such subsystems cannot possibly have their own independent logic, since everything is determined by economic principles and orientations, then it is not necessary to search for independent forms of realizing social freedom. If we wish to take back this false step in socialist theory, then we need to argue for our assumption that the other constitutive spheres of society also depend on specific forms of social freedom” (Honneth 2017, 88).

presuming that its ‘recognition fundamentalism’ is sufficient to deal with social reality and normativity, to turn Honneth’s own expressions against him?

Note that Honneth frequently refers to the work of Michael Walzer in order to defend this idea of social differentiation (Honneth 2003; 2017); nonetheless, it is interesting that Walzer is a distributive thinker, and thus his multidimensionality is of the distributive type. By tracing all spheres back to only one normative logic – be this distributive or recognitive – one runs the risk of presenting the differentiated spheres as internal variations of a unique, sole sphere. Honneth’s recognition monism ultimately converted into socialist multidimensionality thus to some degree reflects Walzer’s subsumption of all the spheres to the distributive logic. Rather, it may be more compelling to view such “spheres” as relating to different normative logics, not reducible to one all-encompassing paradigm. I will develop this idea, which may be called methodological pluralism, or normative multidimensionality, later. There are, anyway, clear resources in the recent developments of Honneth’s thought that may help to revise his earlier untenable monistic normativity.

Note that the conclusions of Honneth’s criticisms of economic monism are of interest for our purposes. The spheres that should be differentiated and considered as distinct realizations of the idea of social freedom (namely the spheres of personal relationships and of democratic politics) imply that the abolition of “heteronomy and alienated labor” not be confined to the economic sphere: all spheres should be subject to social freedom (Honneth 2017, 89). Realizing social freedom at work, I might paraphrase, raises not merely economic concerns, but also concerns involving relationships and democratic decision-making.

We can discern, thus, at least three relevant evolutions in this book. Importantly, these evolutions could be understood as responses to the conceptual barriers that I identified earlier in the recognition paradigm of justice:

- 1) Recognition monism is replaced by the idea of a functional differentiation of spheres.
- 2) The stress on autonomy, positive self-identity and self-realization is replaced by a concern for equality in its connection to freedom, and in the idea of social freedom.
- 3) Social freedom at work should be realized by many spheres, not merely the economic (and, by extension, one could say: not merely the recognitive – I will address this problem in a moment).

(1) and (3) could reverse the *one-dimensionality* barrier, while (2) could reverse the *autonomy without equality* barrier. In these later formulations, thus, Honneth develops interesting insights that could lay the groundwork for moving in the direction of a multidimensional conception of labor justice, beyond recognition monism and the limitations of his earlier normative concepts of work. Note, however, that it is not really clear what the place of recognition in the new framework of social differentiation is supposed to be: is recognition one sphere among the others? Is its role akin to that played by distributive justice in Walzer’s work, as the overarching normative logic lying behind all the spheres? It is not clear. In any case, recognition monism is in clear tension with a renewed concern for normative multidimensionality. I will develop in Chapter V a possible solution to the problem of the relations between the spheres, which I have called the *principle of joint dimensions*, and which I anticipated in Chapter II. According to this principle, among the reasons for determining the remedy relating to a dimension of justice, preference for the remedy that simultaneously improves the conditions of other dimensions of justice should be given.

I have thus discussed the four normative concepts of work elaborated by Honneth over 40 years of reflection. Despite the benefits that recognition theory may offer us, particularly given some of the shortcomings of the distributive perspective, the analysis has shown that some “barriers” impede Honneth’s account from adequately addressing issues of labor justice: the *autonomy without equality*, *one-dimensionality*, *structure-blindness* and *paternalism* barriers. Some resources have been identified in Honneth’s framework that could help us overcome these barriers, such as the model of equal social dignity and autonomy at work proposed in the 80s but later abandoned, and the multidimensional criticism of economism proposed in the last book on socialism. One-dimensionality impedes recognition theory from acknowledging the normative specificities of distribution and contribution. As for structure-blindness, this feature is partially corrected by Honneth’s later account of work as social integration, but this ideal appears to be underdetermined, unrealistically horizontal, and seems not to provide tools to address unequal divisions of labor embedded in our organizational cultures. His identity-centered perspective remains prominent and the tendency to address issues of work in a subjectivistic shape is only partially avoided. Paternalism is risked when giving a precise conception of the good life and self-realization, upon which the normative concepts of work are grounded. Given these shortcomings, let us then turn our attention to another critical theorist, Nancy Fraser.

4. Rethinking Work and Justice Through Nancy Fraser’s Model: Some Premises

In the last few years, most theoretical attention has been given to Honneth’s conception of work. A veritable study area has been developing around his normative approach to work (Deranty 2009; Renault 2017; 2016; Smith 2009). The contributions of Nancy Fraser have enjoyed comparatively far less attention in normative reflections on labor. In what follows, I will attempt to fill in this gap, providing an assessment of the potentialities of Fraser’s contribution to rethink work normatively. Fraser’s proposal may provide fruitful resources for a conception of labor justice, which may overcome the limitations of both the distributive and recognitive approaches considered thus far. Looking at the debate between Honneth and Fraser through the prism of work provides us with further elements for assessment, in that Fraser’s model proves better suited to addressing issues of labor justice.

However, since Fraser is not primarily or specifically interested in developing a normative conception of work even though her consideration of issues of labor is rich (Fraser 1987; 1994a; 1994b; 2016), some amendments of her theory are needed for this purpose. In fact, in her account there is a tendency to assimilate work and the division of labor to the distributive sphere. To be sure, Fraser does not neglect issues of labor, shown by her reflections in “After the Family Wage” (1994) and “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State” (with L. Gordon 1994), as well as the more recent “Contradictions of Capital and Care” (2016). I aim to make explicit some aspects that are already present in Fraser’s account, but which are not fully spelled out. If these dimensions to Fraser’s thought are properly discerned, current debates on justice and work may benefit from her insights, because she may provide the ground for a pragmatic pluralist, multidimensional, and socially interdependent account of social justice, which we have not found thus far in distributive or recognition accounts.

4.2. *Methodological Advantages of a Deontological, Egalitarian, Multidimensional Model*

I will address here the methodological advantages offered by Fraser's framework with respect to Honneth's, and then provide a more articulated development of these intuitions in Chapter V.

First, her model conveys a "*polycentric and multilateral*" view of justice (Fraser 2003, 209) which rejects the usual duality between distribution and recognition as a false antithesis. Fraser's "perspectival dualism" conceptualizes distribution and recognition as "inextricably intertwined", within a relation of "mutual irreducibility and co-implication" (Fraser 2003, 208). Redistribution and recognition are normative paradigms rooted respectively in class and status social divisions; her proposal is to consider these orders as analytically distinct, and yet as essentially intertwined (this bi-dimensional model is later replaced by Fraser with a tripartite model of justice that includes also the paradigm of representation). Against all forms of normative monism (both distributive and recognitive), one should see these paradigms of justice as "co-essential", that is, as mutually related and still irreducible to one another.

Second, Fraser offers a conception of *equality*, contained within the norm of *participatory parity*. According to Fraser, social justice consists in participating in social life as peers, without facing economic, status-based or political impediments. Participatory parity is a "radicalization of widely held folk norms of equality" (Fraser 2003, 210) and a "*radical democratic interpretation* of equal autonomy" (Fraser 2003, 229). The difference from Honneth's view is clear:

Instead of distinguishing kinds of misrecognition according to types of identity injury, I underscore the societal consequence common to them all: the constitution of some classes of persons as *less than full members of society* in a way that prevents them from participating as peers. (Fraser 2003, 221, emphasis added)

Social arrangements can be criticized, thus, because they prevent people from peer participation, not because they harm individuals' identities. As seen above, Honneth's theory of recognition would need an idea of equality in order to address problems of labor injustice. Without a norm of equality, one cannot criticize phenomena like occupational segregation: one may well be recognized for one's abilities and live a situation of moral satisfaction – think for example of the "happy slave" – while this is still compatible with a situation of segregated labor. From this perspective, the notion of parity introduced by Fraser – which is given a "participatory" inflection – may be better equipped to address such inequalities.

Third, Fraser has a *deontological* view of justice, rather than a teleological one, which does not rely on any "authoritative ideal of human flourishing" but rather on the idea of universalizable fairness. In order to accommodate a conception of labor justice, one should decide between a teleological and a deontological perspective. Such a conception, as I argued earlier (Chapter II, §2.1.), should fulfil the condition of pragmatic pluralism. That is, it should not be centered on an idea of self-realization at work nor on a pre-emptively defined ethical meaning of work, because competitive interpretations of the ethical meaning of work co-exist in contemporary societies, and it is not necessary for the sake of social justice to give primary relevance to one interpretation over another. For instance, an ethics of the refusal of work, such as that advocated by Kathi Weeks, should not be rejected via an ethics of self-realization of work, because may be both equally legitimate. In Chapter II I argued for a pluralism

qualified as pragmatic for a precise reason: qualified in this way, it does not entail a total dismissal of the idea of self-realization at work, but rather argues that self-realization is not really of help in defending labor justice. An approach compatible with a competitive ethics of work should thus be preferred to the perfectionist model. Fraser's deontological view may be so compatible; for Fraser, divergent value horizons should be evaluated in a "nonsectarian" way (Fraser 2003, 223), while still we can adjudicate between competing claims and social dilemmas¹²⁰. In this framework, Honneth's view sounds hardly compatible with a deontological view of justice. Even though in 2003 he starts talking about "social justice", still there are problems of compatibility that are highlighted by Fraser (2003).

Finally, Fraser advocates a *status-centered idea of recognition*, rather than one which is identity-centered. I have shown that Honneth's identarian perspective provides limited resources when it comes to addressing issues of inequality in the division of labor, because it tends to be subject-centered and structure-blind, i.e. mostly interested in self-realization and individual autonomy, without showing specific concern for social structures as well as equality. Moreover, Fraser has compellingly assessed Honneth's identarianism as being at risk of reification and essentialism, and as being underdetermined when one must adjudicate between normative conflicts (Fraser 2003). Her proposal of a status-centered idea of recognition avoids such problems because, as I will address in Chapter IV, status is not merely a psychological notion but also a norm embedded in social structures. This thus leads us to a *structure-oriented* view of justice, rather than one which is psychology-oriented. If Honneth's tools conceptualize work injustices as identity injuries or pathologies, Fraser's tools may conceptualize labor injustice in terms of obstacles to participatory parity.

Despite the fact that they have not been conceived of with a specific concern for labor justice, I argue that if adequately reconceptualized, these key features may meet the requirements needed for a conception of labor justice which could be multidimensional, deontological, pragmatically pluralist, egalitarian.

4.3. *Extending Fraser's Model: Some Proposals*

In order to accommodate concerns of labor justice, I will suggest both an extension to, and amendment of, Nancy Fraser's framework. Note that I will not develop here in detail this reformulation, for I will do this in Chapter V. Rather, in this section I will limit myself to some methodological and conceptual premises of such a project, particularly stressing the differences to Honneth's perspective.

The extension proposed will mostly concern three aspects of Fraser's account: (1) the distinct place of work and the division of labor with respect to other paradigms of justice; (2) the idea of status equality; (3) the norm of participatory parity.

1) In order to accommodate issues of labor justice for their own sake, some underdeveloped elements of Fraser's tripartite model of justice concerning the representation of work should be more accurately discerned, made clearer and more explicit, as referring to a different sphere of justice. Along with distribution, recognition, and representation, a further dimension should

¹²⁰ "The approach that I have proposed begins not with a theory of the good life, but with the central moral ideal of modern liberalism: the equal autonomy and moral worth of human beings. In my understandings, this ideal needs no grounding in an ethic of self-realization, as its basic point is to enable the subjects of morality to formulate such ethics for themselves. (...) The implications of equal autonomy can only be articulated deontologically, via a theory of justice that is compatible with a plurality of reasonable views of the good life" (Fraser 2003, 229).

be distinguished, which we may call “contributive”, borrowing the term from Paul Gomberg (2007). The contributive side of labor justice, which cannot be reduced to the economic (distribution), cultural-relational (recognition), and political (representation) dimensions, would involve: the nature of roles and tasks, the social relations of cooperation and authority in the division of labor, and labor time. More precisely, it would include what may be referred to as the *qualitative* side (the “what” and “how” of contribution) and the *quantitative* side (the “when” and “how much”) of contribution. This will allow us to conceptualize a specific form of injustice rooted in labor structures, which I will call *miscontribution*, as related to a discrete, irreducible paradigm of justice.

2) Fraser’s relatively undetermined idea of *status equality* could be further enriched by taking into account the insights from recent debates of relational egalitarianism. I will search for this expansion in two traditions: the sociology of status inequality and the relational egalitarian debate (see Chapter IV). I will argue that once the concept of recognition is unburdened from its psychological charge and the reference to a strongly perfectionist view of self-realization is put aside, it may get closer to the concept of social equality. In fact, most relational egalitarian debates are focused on the idea of *equality of status* rather than positive relations to the self (Fourie 2012; Fourie et al. 2015; Anderson 1999; 2017; Scanlon 2000; 2017). Their relatively depsychologized reading of the matter shows their closeness to Nancy Fraser’s perspective. The concept of status or social equality may thus work as a joining bridge between the critical and analytical accounts of relational justice, besides providing an alternative route in the face of a lack of egalitarian tools in Honneth’s account.

3) I will also attempt to give a more precise inflection to Fraser’s egalitarian norm of participatory parity in the sphere of work and the division of labor. I will argue that, translated into contributive terms, the norm of participatory parity essentially means that the contributions of each person to social cooperation through work should occur on a peer basis. I will call this norm *contributive parity*. Through this norm, current forms of labor organization may be criticized not because they do not allow workers to identify in the product of their labor (*self-transformation model*), nor because they prevent workers from getting meritocratic achievement (*achievement model*), nor because they impede them from being solidaristically integrated through the division of labor (*social integration model*), but because *they prevent workers from contributing to social cooperation as peers*. I will reflect on these ideas in Chapter V.

	Nancy Fraser		Axel Honneth	
	Fraser’s Theory	Labor Justice: possible reinterpretation	Honneth’s Theory	Labor Justice with Honneth’s tools
Principles	<i>Participatory Parity</i>	Contributive parity: contributing to social cooperation as peers	<i>Self-Realization</i>	Being self-realized in the workplace
Normative mode	<i>Deontological</i>	Discerning between fair and unfair labor structures regardless of competing ethics of work	<i>Teleological</i>	Finding in one’s labor the sources for a good life

Social structures and subjects	<i>Class and Status</i>	Class and status inequalities rooted in the division of labor that prevent people's peer contribution should be reduced	<i>Identity</i>	Social esteem at work allows positive self-relation ¹²¹
Normative differentiation	<i>Tripartite Justice</i>	Polycentric labor justice: Labor justice should simultaneously involve distributive, relational, representative and contributive concerns as relatively independent and yet co-essential dimensions of labor justice	<i>Recognition Monism</i>	Social recognition determines pay differentials and the social demarcation of occupations

However, the project of integrating a distinctive concern for labor justice into Fraser's model requires that some limitations in her account be overcome. I identify these limitations in her assimilation of issues of work to distributive issues (even though conceived of in a multidimensional shape). In fact, Fraser addresses issues of labor justice by essentially casting them as matters of distribution (see Fraser 2003). This may be seen as mirroring the general tendency in political philosophy of reducing work to the sphere of distribution. Interestingly, in Fraser's account, the distributive paradigm covers a wide range of different issues, such as:

- *property regime,*
- *income,*
- *welfare provisions,* and
- *the division of labor.*

Thus, there seems to be a conceptual indeterminacy and theoretical fluctuation in Fraser's description of the distributive paradigm, which fails to do justice to the essential differences between these elements. Arguably, *welfare provisions* and *labor-mediated wage* point to distinct realities; the same goes for the notions of *economic class* and the *division of labor*, which I will address later. Such assimilation becomes increasingly evident in her consideration of class and status as being the only social structures involved in social justice, to the detriment of the specificity of the division of labor. This is at risk of taking us back to the shortcomings of the distributive models of justice. Recall that the first part of the thesis establishes that labor issues shouldn't be simply assimilated to distributive issues as Fraser does. Their analytical distinctiveness and normative specificity should be acknowledged. In what follows, I suggest some justifications of this claim.

Fraser relates the normative paradigms of distribution and recognition to two systems of social differentiation: *class* and *status*. In her account, each corresponds to an "analytically distinct form of subordination":

The recognition dimension corresponds to *status subordination*, rooted in institutionalized patterns of cultural value; the distributive dimension, in contrast, corresponds to *economic class subordination*, rooted in structural features of the economic system. [...] The key point is that each of the two dimensions of justice is associated with an analytically distinct aspect of social order (Fraser 2003).

Labor is thus traced back to the realm of economic class subordination. In Fraser's account on distribution, there is a continuous shift from class to the division of labor and from the division

¹²¹ I am considering here the achievement model.

of labor to class, and it is not clear where the one starts and where the other ends, for instance whether they are to be considered as the same thing. For example, in what follows Fraser describes gender as a “double category”, that works both as a class-like and status-like category:

On the one hand, [gender] structures the fundamental division between paid “productive” labor and unpaid “reproductive” and domestic labor, assigning women primary responsibility for the latter. On the other hand, gender also structures the division within paid labor between higher-paid, male-dominated manufacturing and professional occupations and lower-paid, female dominated “pink collar” and domestic service occupations. The result is an economic structure that generates gender-specific forms of distributive injustice, including gender-based exploitation, economic marginalization, and deprivation. Here, gender appears as a class-like differentiation that is rooted in the economic structure of society. [...] *Eliminating gender-specific maldistribution requires abolishing the gender division of labor* – both the gendered division between paid and unpaid labor and the gender divisions within paid labor (Fraser 2003, 20, emphasis added).

In this example, the categories of class and of the division of labor overlap. On the one hand, Fraser says, gender works as a class-like differentiation. Thus, she adds, “eliminating gender-specific maldistribution requires abolishing the gender division of labor”. But are class and the division of labor the same thing? In Part I I showed that intervening on economic inequality does not automatically make the division of labor fair. Here there is a conceptual indeterminacy in whether the distributive perspective should be one of *class* or of the *division of labor*¹²².

This continuous shift from one category to another within the paradigm of distribution may be explained by Fraser’s debts to the work of Max Weber, who conceives of class as a position within the market, with labor market and employment relations included. As John Scott observes, according to Weber “class divisions arise from the possession and lack of possession of property and *the employment relations that follow from this*” (Scott 1996, 24, emphasis added). For Weber, class essentially refers to one’s economic position in the market, and one’s position in the market involves also one’s employment position. Class and employment are thus merged into one and the same category. Therefore, Fraser’s assimilation of work and the division of labor into the realm of “class” and “distribution” may be explained by her appeal to Max Weber’s theory. However, note that it seems to be a common feature of social theory to assimilate together class and the division of labor¹²³.

If this explains her oscillations, one should still bear in mind that the division of labor is a segment of social differentiation which is not reducible to class or to status, and thus not sufficiently represented in such a framework. Specifically, while classes describe economic positions in the market (if one embraces the Weberian view), the division of labor broadly refers to the social organization of roles and tasks within a system of interdependences, involving:

the decomposition of processes of (re)production, wealth creation, and knowledge development into separate tasks, each of which is performed by an individual or collective agent: a person, a class of persons, a region, a nation, an organization, or an institution (Sturn 2015, 601).

The social organization of roles and tasks in the division of labor doesn’t simply coincide with one’s position in terms of class and status, even though they overlap and interact in a very important way (see Giddens 1983). This is not to say that Fraser’s choice is inherently wrong,

¹²² For some critical remarks on Fraser’s concept of class, see Lazzeri 2009.

¹²³ For a rich account of the interconnections between class and the division of labor, see Giddens 1983.

rather, I claim that for reasons of analytical precision as well as normative effectiveness, differences between people's work and position in the division of labor should be more accurately distinguished from differences in class and status. Work is not entirely represented by these segments. Class and status do not include *per se* the division of labor¹²⁴. *The division of labor is a cross-cutting category, which runs through both class and status*. Classes, statuses and the division of labor are deeply interwoven, and yet irreducible and autonomous categories. There is a relation of mutual implication, where each bears its own specificity (see Chapter IV).

The addition of the concept of the division of labor in the framework allows us to focus more directly on work and the specific regimes of social differentiation involved, without reducing it to other social structures. The division of labor's perspective is *transversal and oblique* to class and status divisions. As Iris Marion Young has stressed, the concept of the division of labor enables us to grasp "specific cleavages and contradictions within a class" (Young 1981, 51), as well as within a gender and 'race' (Weeks, 2011). The methodological advantage of this standpoint relies on the possibility of covering a multiplicity of divisions occurring *within classes (and, I add, statuses) themselves*. Consider, for instance, the aversion of autochthon workers against migrant workers, which has been qualified as an example of class struggle among people from within the same class (Gallino 2012). Indeed, the category of the division of labor covers a range of phenomena that are not only wider than those of class, "but also more concrete" (Young 1981, 51). Unlike class, it "refers specifically to the activity of labor itself, and the specific social and institutional relations of that activity", proceeding "at the more concrete level of particular relations of interaction and interdependence in a society" (Young 1981, 51).

In the end, one may say that whereas class refers to the outcomes of laboring activity, the division of labor "refers specifically to the activity of labor itself, and the specific social and institutional relations of that activity, rather than to a relation to the means of labor and the products of labor, as does class" (Young 1981, 51)¹²⁵.

In Young's discussion, it is mostly the category of class that is differentiated from the category of division of labor. However, the connection with status is also of crucial importance. I will develop this point in the next chapter; nonetheless, note that it is precisely here that Fraser's framework proves to be fruitful. Her perspective is not confined to class like the distributive perspective, nor to relations of recognition, as in the case of Honneth. Her

¹²⁴ "The division of labor category appears in Marx's own work almost as often as the class category, and he uses both in an equally ambiguous and equivocal fashion. One wonders, then, why the category of class has been taken up, refined and developed by the marxist theoretical tradition, while the category of division of labor has remained undeveloped" (Young 1981, 51).

¹²⁵ "Each category entails a different level of abstraction. Class analysis aims to get a vision of a system of production as a whole, and thus asks about the broadest social divisions of ownership, control, and the appropriation of surplus product. At such a level of abstraction, however, much pertaining to the relations of production and the material bases of domination remains hidden. Division of labor analysis proceeds at the more concrete level of particular relations of interaction and interdependence in a society which differentiates it into a complex network. It describes the major structural divisions among the members of a society according to their position in laboring activity, and assesses the effect of these divisions on the functioning of the economy, the relations of domination, political and ideological structures. Centrality as important as class can have implications for analysis of phenomena in addition to gender differentiation. For example, questions surrounding the role of professionals and state workers in contemporary capitalism might be better resolved through division of labor analysis than class analysis. Analysis of racial tension in the contemporary working class as well as in the society as a whole, to take another example, might benefit from inquiring into the correlations of race with aspects of the contemporary division of labor. Finally, the indubitable presence of relations of domination in existing socialist societies might be better analyzed in terms of division of labor than in terms of class" (Young 1981, 51-52).

polycentric perspective makes possible the consideration of both concepts, with their interconnections and specificities.

Chapter IV

Social Equality and the Division of Labor

*The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew (...), there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences (...) which cannot be wiped out by any schemes of mental culture. Children of this group should be segregated in special classes (...). They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers. (Lewis Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, 1916)*

It is time we took status more seriously.
(C. Ridgeway)

The idea of equality has many meanings. In Chapters I and II, I investigated the distributive response to the “Equality of what?” (Sen 1979) question. I found that most distributive models do not consider work to be a fully-fledged issue of justice, and conceptualize equality only in distributive terms. According to these models, equality has to do with the allocation of goods. I have shown that distributive justice is not sufficient to satisfactorily deal with all issues of labor justice, but a fair distribution of goods is nonetheless important. Distributive equality should not, however, be dismissed as irrelevant to labor justice: on the contrary, it should be understood as a fundamental – while insufficient – strand of labor justice. The multidimensionality requirement asks that distributive equality be taken as one of the many dimensions of labor justice, and not as an overarching, all-encompassing paradigm under which all problems are to be subsumed.

The distributive perspective’s inadequate tools to conceptualize social relations led me to recognition theory. I found in Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition some insights to address the symbolic and psychological dynamics involved in workers’ normative expectations to be recognized, identifying some key concepts of recognition at work. All things considered, monist recognition theory proved one-dimensional and weakly attentive to social structures and institutions. Most of these concepts proved to have limited normative scope with respect to inequalities in the division of labor. Only one of them, I found, provides a rough conceptualization of equality (aside from the equal rights sphere of recognition). Workers respond to social devaluations of their contributions through a “counterculture of compensatory respect” which reflects an awareness of getting a lower share of social dignity in the occupational hierarchy, where their class position translates into unequal access to social respect and autonomy at work. The concept of work as equal social dignity and autonomy, sketched out by Honneth in the first stage of his writing and later abandoned, may point to a faint counterfactual idea of what it means to be equal at work in a *relational* sense. This embryonic idea of *egalitarian recognition* was only roughly suggested by Honneth in his 1982 article, and then abandoned to turn to issues of autonomy and self-realization in abstraction from contributive inequalities. Unfortunately, it plays a relatively marginal role in Honneth’s framework.

However, taking this rough idea forward, one may consider the key insight suggested by John Rawls and Thomas Scanlon, that status inequality is the reason for which inequality is inherently wrong (Rawls 2001; Scanlon 2000) as complementing Honneth's intuition. In fact, the very concept of "status" implies a distinction between superiors and inferiors that hardly fits with the idea of the equal moral worth of all, harming people's sense of self-worth. Given that contributive inequalities tend to rely on, and to reproduce, status inequalities, concerns for social equality appear to be highly relevant for labor justice. Yet, the theory of recognition provides scarce tools to address this: the achievement principle takes contributive inequalities as a given, without sufficiently problematizing social inequalities. It is thus necessary to search for other tools that may help us understand in what sense work and the way it is organized is relevant for social equality.

Despite the widely documented and crucial role played by work and its organizational structure in perpetuating social inequalities, the issue tends to be neglected by contemporary theorists of justice. Exceptions include workplace democracy theorists, some relational egalitarians, and theorists of contributive justice. The literature on workplace democracy is particularly rich and well-known, showing some awareness of issues of social equality (Bowles and Gintis 1993; Cohen 1989; Pateman 1970; Dow 2002; Néron 2015). Far less considered are the insights that relational egalitarians and contributive justice theorists may provide to rethink social equality in the division of labor. In this section, I will focus on relational egalitarian insights, and I will devote the next chapter (V) to contributive justice insights.

The basic intuition of this chapter is that, since it is especially concerned with social hierarchies, relational egalitarianism may be particularly suited to addressing labor-related social inequalities. Within the relational egalitarian framework, we may find the tools that we did not find in Honneth's account. In current accounts, social equality is often described as "an opposition to hierarchies of social status" (Fourie 2012, 109; Scheffler 2003, 22). Likewise, David Miller believes that social equality designates "the ideal of a society that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories" (Miller 1998, 23). Relational egalitarians repudiate any idea of difference in the moral worth that people have, particularly if "based on birth or social identity". Inegalitarianism, by contrast, defends a social order based on "a hierarchy of human beings ranked according to intrinsic worth" (Anderson 1999, 312).

The relational egalitarian tradition may provide a suitable framework to address the relational side of labor justice. However, few relational egalitarians have addressed work and the division of labor as distinctive issues of relational concern. Thus, in this section I will ask how relational egalitarians may help us address social equality at work. After all, it is a primary aim of relational egalitarianism to consider "what kinds of institutions and practices a society must put in place if it is to count as a society of equals" (Scheffler 2015a, 21). This question is very often addressed by relational egalitarians with respect to distributive patterns. Few of them ask this question with respect to work – or, in other words, with respect to *contributive* patterns. Thus, following the spirit of the question, "what kinds of distributions are consistent with the ideal of a society of equals?" I will address by analogy a slightly different question, aiming to locate what is, I believe, a genuine relational egalitarian concern: *how do labor relations contribute to realizing, or harming, social equality?*

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to take a step back and ground the normative perspective in empirically informed research. In order to prevent status from

turning into contributive inequality, and contributive inequality from turning into status, one should clarify the ways in which they affect each other. In the following section, I will thus briefly outline the findings of sociological research on status inequality, with a focus on labor relations and organizations. This will enable us to turn to political philosophy with a sociologically informed perspective, which is often lacking in philosophical accounts. In particular, I will address the problem of status because it is a sociological concept that political philosophers in the relational tradition widely use in their arguments. Despite this wide use, its meaning is not always clear (Fourie 2012). Probably, this is due to the general tendency of philosophers to overlook sociological research – unfortunately, this considerably restricts the scope of their concepts, as this chapter will show. The case of status shows this particularly clearly. In fact, the tendency to consider status as a merely psychological issue seems, in some cases, to prevent theorists from seeing the structural ways in which it ends up being embedded into institutions and social practices, even shaping the division of labor. Taking the insights of sociology into consideration will enable us to propose a distinction between interactional and structural status inequality, and to argue that it is especially to the structural level that our normative concerns are to be directed. I will take work and the division of labor to provide structural examples of social inequality.

1. Turning to Sociology: What Does Status Inequality Mean?

Traditional definitions of status were primarily legal, for it was associated with privileges and duties publicly recognized by the law. Later, status started to be associated with customs and values, rather than with legal obligations and privileges. One of the first authors to offer a sociological theorization of the concept, Max Weber, defined status as “a quality of honor or a lack of it” within a system of social stratification based on common customs and values (Weber 1974 [1948], 405). Everett Hughes observed that “status is the original of a whole family of words referring to the physical act of standing, but long since broadened by metaphor to include features of human society, of people in society, and their reputations” (Hughes 1974, 285). Since statuses form a hierarchy by definition, the term has the additional meaning of “rank” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 102). Thus, broadly speaking, in sociology the idea of status designates “the location and position of individuals and collectivities in the social hierarchy of honor and prestige” (Kantzara 2016, 1).

Status is considered to be one of the axes of social stratification. In Weber’s theory, status is based on the “social order”, whereas class is part of the “economic order” (parties are rather part of the “political order”). Class and status thus denote distinct realities, for prestige and honor do not coincide with one’s wealth, property and income. Even in a world where distributive equality was perfectly realized, social inequalities would still be likely to emerge. “Even in the affluent society”, Ralf Dahrendorf observes, “it remains a stubborn and remarkable fact that men are unequally placed” (Dahrendorf 1972, 88). Consider that redistribution of property under the Soviet Union did not eliminate social inequalities (Dahrendorf 1972; Roemer 1982). Studies have shown that poor people acquire “positional goods” in order to ameliorate their social standing, even if their resources do not allow them to have such a standing (Hirsch 1978). Social inequalities concern not so much what people own, but how they relate to each other, and how they attribute social worth.

That said, the correlation between higher amounts of material resources and particular group membership is widely demonstrated; as Ridgeway notes, “a common precondition for the development of status beliefs about two social groups is that people in one group become, on average, richer in material resources than those from another” (Ridgeway 2016, 2; 1991)¹²⁶. Let us reflect for a moment on the relationship between class and status – or between material resources and social rankings.

In Weber’s tripartite conception of social stratification, status groups and social classes are connected by relationships of mutual conversion, but remain essentially distinct. These relationships entail that “a highly valued status group will acquire wealth and power, and a wealthy class will eventually acquire a high status” (Kantzara 2016, 2). This process was later defined as “status conversion mechanism” (Benoit 1966 [1944]; Kantzara 2016, 2), which Pierre Bourdieu reinterpreted as the ‘convertibility of capitals’. According to Bourdieu, a person’s economic, social, cultural and symbolic resources can be described as “capitals” which they invest in the social world and which influence the access they have to desired goods and positions (Bourdieu 2016 [1979]; 2011 [1986])¹²⁷. As a political theorist rather than a sociologist, Michael Walzer’s idea of injustice cannot be understood separately from the *convertibility* of what he refers to as “social goods” (Walzer 1983; 1984). Walzer turns a sociological idea into a philosophical norm: on his view, injustice lies in the conversion of goods into inappropriate spheres. Sociologists and philosophers, thus, converge on the view that material resources are convertible into status, and vice versa, but that they are not the same thing.

Conversion should not be seen as necessary, but rather as possible. There is no automatic connection between one’s amount of resources and one’s social status, which was also Max Weber’s belief (see Scott 1996). In general, it can be observed that material inequalities and social inequalities follow their own logics, and despite their interconnections, there is no necessary, causal relationship between them. One’s social status cannot be simply inferred from one’s property and income. The idea that status follows a logic independent to class is emphasized by Cecilia Ridgeway (2014). Status has an “independent force” that, if unacknowledged, results in a limited capacity to explain why inequalities persist despite economic and social change (Ridgeway 2014; Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993)¹²⁸. Therefore, following a logic relatively *independent* to one of material resources, status inequalities cannot be fully accounted for from a distributive perspective (Néron 2015). A distinct normative perspective should rely on status-related attitudes and organizational patterns without reducing status issues to issues of goods-allocations.

Empirical research has extended these findings by demonstrating that inequalities in the distribution of any “biasing factor” influence the development of hierarchies leading to the

¹²⁶ “An individuals’ high status in the economic hierarchy will match the achieved status in the “political hierarchy”, and this will in turn be equivalent to the status in the “hierarchy of prestige”” (Kantzara 2016, 3; Benoit, 1966 [1944], 80).

¹²⁷ In Bourdieu’s view (2016 [1979]; 2011 [1986]), being owners of a certain amount of one type of capital – for instance, a university degree, which is cultural capital – may allow one to convert that capital into another capital currency: for instance, either a symbolic capital (in the form of social prestige) or an economic capital (in the form of higher pay). Having strong social capital – what Mike Savage has called one’s valuable “portfolio of contacts” (Savage 2014) – may be turned into economic capital, because knowing ‘the right persons in the right moment’ can facilitate access to jobs and positions. It seems that Bourdieu never explains *why* this happens, for he confines himself to a theoretical description of this phenomenon.

¹²⁸ Status, like resources and power, is a basic source of human motivation that powerfully shapes the struggle for precedence out of which inequality emerges. Equally, we need to appreciate that inequality processes at the micro level work together with those at the macro level to create the *mutually sustaining patterns of inequality* among social groups in society that make such patterns so difficult to change. (...) It is time we took status more seriously. (Ridgeway 2014, emphasis added)

emergence of status beliefs (Ridgeway 2016; Ridgeway et al. 1998; Webster and Hysom 1998). Social statuses are thus associated with “distinguishing traits” to which society attributes “a hierarchical value that generally represents the scale of social worth in society” (Kantzara 2016, 1). Such biasing factors, or distinguishing traits, cause beliefs about superior or inferior competence, around which there develops a consensus – they must be considered as “valid” – which end up being propagated in society (Ridgeway 2016):

The unequal distribution of such a “biasing factor” means that, in intercategory encounters, there will be a systematically greater likelihood that people from the group with more of the factor will emerge as the influential actors in the situation compared to people from the group with less of the factor. (Ridgeway 2016)

Status inequalities do not result automatically from social differences: they originate in an *act of evaluation* (Dahrendorf 1972) – of which there we are not necessarily cognitively aware¹²⁹ (Kantzara 2016; Fourie 2012) – and which draws on publicly circulating normative grammars concerning social differences and their relative worth. After all, it is a well-known sociological truth that humans are “evaluative animals” (Treiman 1977, 19). Such evaluations are grounded on beliefs about which categories or groups are more respectable; they are not mere evaluations of preference or taste: they are *moral* evaluations, “carrying a connotation of the relative worthiness of the attribute being judged” (Treiman 1977, 20). There is empirical evidence that status beliefs persist over time even once the historical cause of such beliefs has disappeared, as beliefs about race, gender, and other social differences paradigmatically show (Ridgeway 2011).

Status is thus a belief that is “acted on” others:

Interpersonal influence hierarchies develop implicitly, through multiple small behaviors that the participants rarely scrutinize. Since the actual origins of their influence hierarchy are obscure to them but their categorical difference is salient, the theory argues that there is some chance that the participants will associate their apparent difference in esteem and competence in the situation with their categorical difference. If the same association is repeated for them in subsequent intercategory encounters, the theory argues that it will eventually induce them to form generalized status beliefs about the categorical distinction.

Once people form such status beliefs, they carry them to their next encounters with those from the other group and act on them there. By treating categorically different others according to the status belief, belief holders induce at least some of the others to take on the belief as well. In effect, they “teach” the others the beliefs by acting on it. This in turn creates a diffusion process that has the potential to spread the new status belief widely in the population. (Ridgeway 2016, 1)

What makes such beliefs so powerful? According to Cecilia Ridgeway, status beliefs are about what “most people think”, and the awareness that they are widely shared make them seem socially valid: this gives status beliefs the force of a “shared reality”, for everyone expects that “others are likely to treat one in terms of those beliefs” (Ridgeway et al. 2009, 45). Status biases “repeat over and over again” in the countless encounters that take place in a variety of environments (Ridgeway 2014).

Unsurprisingly, such evaluations lead to other evaluative inferences about individuals’ competence. The higher a person’s status, the higher the chance that her performance will be positively evaluated, “regardless of whether it is indeed qualitatively better” (Kantzara 2016,

¹²⁹ “Although we participate every day in these social relational effects of status beliefs, we rarely see how they involve us in the production of who is better and more deserving of resources and advantages”. (Ridgeway 2014)

3). That is, status works as an *expectation of competence: status beliefs translate into higher or lower levels of respect and assumed competence for socially valued tasks based on the category of social difference* – e.g. categories of men and white people, versus women and people of color (Ridgeway 2016, 1). As Cecilia Ridgeway effectively puts it:

A typical reaction to the recognition of social difference is for people in each category to assume that their own group is “better.” When status beliefs develop about a recognized social difference, however, they transform simple difference into an evaluative hierarchy so that the difference becomes a status characteristic in society. When status beliefs about a social difference become widely shared, they have widespread consequences for inequality among socially different individuals and groups. (Ridgeway 2016, 1)

To recapitulate: status is an act of evaluation and a belief that determines different grades of respect and attributes different levels of competence to people based on socially biasing traits relating to social differences. For instance, the social differences “woman” or “black” are associated with beliefs of competence and expected behaviors that translate into status hierarchies, which in turn result in the reproduction of existing inequalities.

Before 1970, status was mostly used to refer to scales of prestige and honor; after that, the concept was employed to describe the relative standings of disadvantaged social groups in terms of gender or ethnicity (Kantzara 2016). It is justified, then, to use the term “status” both in order to refer *broadly to one’s position in social rankings*, and *specifically to one’s gender, race, or class*. What must be retained here is that status distinctions based on social differences like gender and race “affect how people are treated and how they treat others in turn”, and “implicitly bias the everyday processes through which people are evaluated, given access to rewards, and directed toward or away from positions of power and prestige in society” (Ridgeway et al. 2009, 44). Not only does it consolidate status bias, but it also constitutes a powerful legitimating tool for current inequalities:

Contemporary U.S. status beliefs assert that people in a particular category, say whites, men, or the middle or upper class, are not only more respected but also presumed to be more *competent*, especially at what “counts most” in society, than are people in contrasting categories, such as people of color, women, or the working class (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). This presumption of greater competence implies that higher status people have fairly won their better jobs and higher incomes on the basis of their own superior merit. It thus provides an especially powerful form of legitimation. (Ridgeway 2014)

As a result, the production of “who is better” ends up legitimating “inequality in an apparently meritocratic society” (Ridgeway 2014).

1.1. *Status as a Norm*

If statuses result from evaluations and beliefs, they are grounded on social norms (which are “socially established values”) and norms, by definition, rely upon sanctions (Dahrendorf 1972, 100)¹³⁰. Of course, the sanctions involved here are not of the legal type: they are *social*

¹³⁰ “The hard core of social inequality can always be found in the fact that men are subject, according to their attitude to the expectations of their society, to sanctions which guarantee the obligatory character of these expectations” (Dahrendorf 1972, 100). Status inequalities are not legally coded, they concern the social structure: “status hierarchies need not be legally coded and coercively enforced; they are often part of social structure without necessarily being part of a society’s legal structure. Consider, for example, a social norm which directs those of lower status to stand when someone of higher status enters a

sanctions, consisting of “rewards or punishments for conformist or deviant behaviour”. The selection of norms “from the universe of possible established values” involves acts of evaluation against “social positions which may debar their incumbents from conformity with the established values” (Dahrendorf 1972, 101). Thus, as in Dahrendorf’s example, if gossip among women in the neighbourhood is a norm, the woman who does not take part in gossiping “necessarily becomes an outsider who cannot compete in prestige with ordinary housewives” (Dahrendorf 1972, 101-102). The characteristics that are likely to become normative can vary widely, but completely different criteria can be embraced. Consider, for instance, China’s current Social Credit System, which institutionalizes status hierarchies among citizens, functioning as a system of reward and incentive – and also of course of penalties – led by the government, in order to produce a publicly controlled ranking of the “good citizen”, which in turn mediates citizens’ access to services and resources.

Another element is missing from this picture: in order for status norms to be complied with, they need some form of authority to enforce them. Without an enforcing authority, as it were, *values* can hardly become *norms*. This is why Dahrendorf concludes that “the trinity of norm, sanction and power” is best suited to describing the way social stratification works. The intermeshing between status inequalities and power thus becomes crucial:

For the system of inequality, this means that the person who will be most favourably placed in society is the person who best succeeds in adapting himself to the ruling norms; and it also means, vice versa, that the established or ruling values of a society may be studied in their purest form by looking at its upper class. (...) In this sense, every society honours the conformism which sustains it, i.e. its ruling groups; but by the same token, every society also produces within itself the resistance which leads to its supersession. (Dahrendorf 1972, 106)

If status norms are sustained by implicit rewards and sanctions, those who are now willing to comply with them will pay a price. They must have to choose, for example, between leaving the social group or showing deference towards those who are higher-ranked. Sometimes leaving the group involves costs which are too high for the individual, and thus deference is the only viable option – this indeed depends on the options of action that the subject actually has (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017). Showing deference provides at least a “baseline respect” to the group members that are lower ranked: “it is respect for knowing one’s place (...). Yet it is still a type of worthiness. It is an acceptance of the low-status member not as an object of scorn but as a worthy member who understands and affirms the group’s standards of value” (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017). Opting for deference, “despite its personal costs”¹³¹, at least offers “the partial compensation of collective approval and respect”:

(...) when a lower status member defers as expected to a higher-status member, the group reacts by viewing the low-status member as reasonable and worthy of a modicum of baseline respect. The dignity of being deemed reasonable, we argue, acts as a modest but meaningful incentive that tempts the low-status member to stay involved in the group endeavor despite being less valued.

room. Relationships of social inequality could thus be formal, codified and institutionalised, or they can be informal and can characterise how people interact on an everyday level, in private and socially” (Fourie 2012, 115).

¹³¹ “In any given situation, the power of this modest incentive to actually induce deference depends on the low-status actor’s access to an alternative course of action. One alternative is to simply leave the group. Structural constraints in the workplace and elsewhere may sometimes make this alternative impractical (i.e., very costly), but not in all situations. The point here, however, is that to the extent that deference earns a positive reward of respect and approval, leaving the group becomes a less attractive alternative than it otherwise would be. The other alternative would be for the low-status actor to remain in the group but try to alter the group’s low performance expectations and improve his or her status position. This alternative, however, is high risk–high reward for the actor”. (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017)

This incentive system means, however, that for low-status members, the price of being seen as reasonable is often deference. (...) Accepting a low-status position also makes these members subject to more negative and self-blaming emotions like sadness or guilt while high-status members feel more positive emotions like pride (...). Thus, low status has costs. Yet if people do not defer when others have firmly held low expectations for them, they risk criticism and rejection. (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017, 133 ff.)

Group members' "implicit coalitions to pressure each other to defer" draw on the same public grammar of values and shared beliefs about the expected competence associated with each other's social characteristics (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017). Status consensus thus appears as a "reasonable assessment" of who is objectively "better", and determines how respect is allocated in the group. Note that individuals coming from low-status groups cannot easily challenge the status hierarchy. Any attempt to challenge it would be at the cost of facing hostile reactions, especially from high-status individuals (Ridgeway 2014; Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994).

1.1.1. *Status Attitudes*

The "small behaviours" that strengthen and reproduce status norms stem from a rich constellation of attitudes. Typically, deference and internalized inferiority become visible, for example, when certain individuals are expected "to look down when they are spoken to, or to speak only when spoken to" (Fourie 2012, 114). Fourie recalls that in the US, black people were expected to step off the pavement in the presence of whites, and that in apartheid South Africa, black people were expected to call whites "Baas" (boss) and "Madam", whereas white people could refer to adult black people as "boy" or "girl" (Fourie 2012, 107). Runciman (1967) also highlights culturally specific behaviours that treat individuals differently depending on how much respect they are afforded; for instance, in certain societies respect is expressed by bowing (Runciman 1967; Fourie 2012).

Status differences tend to shape people's personality traits, the ways in which they relate to the world and the structures of their aspirations. Ridgeway (2011) highlights that whereas the status advantaged "speak up eagerly", the status disadvantaged "hesitate". One and the same idea may 'sound better' when it comes from the advantaged, who seem to fit "the "type" for leadership" (Ridgeway 2014). The economists Bowles and Gintis have called this phenomenon "the reproduction of consciousness" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 127). Individuals, they point out, accept the pattern of social relationships which they experience in their everyday lives, which "often acts as an inertial stabilizing force" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 128) – people learn to exclude from the scope of their aspirations things that are seen as out of their reach, meaning not for 'their kind of people':

When the working population is effectively stratified, individual needs and self-concepts develop in a correspondingly fragmented manner. Youth of different racial, sexual, ethnic, or economic characteristics directly perceive the economic positions and prerogatives of "their kind of people." By adjusting their aspiration accordingly, they not only reproduce stratification on the level of personal consciousness, but bring their needs into (at least partial) harmony with the fragmented conditions of economic life. Similarly, individuals tend to channel the development of their personal powers— cognitive, emotional, physical, aesthetic, and spiritual— in directions where they will have an opportunity to exercise them. Thus the alienated character of work, for example, leads people to guide their creative potentials to areas outside of economic activity: consumption, travel, sexuality, and family life. So needs and need-satisfaction again tend to fall into congruence and alienated labor is reproduced on the level of personal consciousness. (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 128)

Through the “inertial force” of everyday experience, people readjust their aspirations to ‘suit’ their social position. What Bourdieu called “the field of the possible” rooted in individuals’ class experience (Bourdieu 2016 [1979]) is reproduced at the level of one’s consciousness of one’s own social position. According to Bowles and Gintis, all institutions participate in these dynamics, including the family and the educational system: they tailor “the self-concepts, aspirations, and social class identifications of individuals to the requirements of the social division of labor” (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 128). On the whole,

By subtly shaping behavior, status beliefs create inequalities in assertive versus deferential behavior, actual task performance, attributions of ability, influence, and situational rewards between otherwise equal men and women, whites and non-whites, and middleclass and working-class people. (Ridgeway 2014)

Sociological research has developed a “dramaturgical approach” that provides an account of the interactions that create and reproduce inequalities. Drawing on Goffman’s theory, this approach explores “the implicit rules and procedural expectations of those around us” (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Goffman 1959). It is precisely at the level, indeed, of “implicit rules” that status hierarchies are created and reproduced, since status beliefs become normative expectations about how people should behave. They thus form the *interactional basis of social inequality* (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014).

In short, status powerfully influences the way people act, think, and treat each other. However, this is far from being a merely psychological issue, for it has very concrete consequences for overall inequalities. In fact, the “aggregate result” of these status-related unequal treatments is to “transform categorical differences between people into systematic axes of inequality” (Ridgeway et al. 2009, 44). Valuations and behaviours shaped by status beliefs and norms crucially mediate people’s access to power, positions, resources:

People form status beliefs that the “type” of people who have more resources (e.g., whites) are “better” than the “types” with fewer resources. Furthermore, because both advantaged and disadvantaged groups experience the apparent “superiority” of the advantaged “type,” the resulting status beliefs are shared by dominants and subdominants alike, legitimating the inequality (Jackman 1994; Ridgeway and Correll 2006)

The cumulative outcome of such status behaviours is that individuals coming from more advantaged groups are “systematically tracked into positions of greater resources and power, contributing as an independent force to the patterning of material inequality based on gender, race, and class attributes” (Ridgeway 2014). As Dahrendorf observes, “social norms and sanctions are the basis not only of ephemeral individual rankings but also of lasting structures of social positions” (Dahrendorf 1972, 102).

Let us summarize. Status consists in beliefs of assumed competence which act as normative expectations about how people should behave and which generate attitudes of differential respect. Such beliefs are supported by distinguishing traits or biasing factors associated with social differences (gender, race, class, ethnicity). The beliefs propagate throughout society in the form of attitudes and small behaviours, thereby acquiring the force of a shared reality. Status beliefs are thus “acted on” others through small behaviours that reflect implicit rules of how people should be treated. As a norm, its force depends on social rewards and sanctions: in some cases, individuals must comply with certain implicit status rules, in order to remain

part of groups that it would be too costly to leave. Such beliefs, normative expectations, attitudes and behaviours constitute the *interactional basis* of systematic inequalities: far from being solely confined to people's minds, status ends up acquiring the force of *durable inequalities* embedded in social structures and institutions (Tilly 1998). One of the crucial institutional mechanisms which both reflects and reproduces status inequalities is labor and the way it is organized.

1.2. *How Status "Works"*

What does all of this have to do with labor inequalities? As highlighted, status is not merely a psychological matter; it is a shared norm circulating through attitudes and behaviors that mediate people's access to rewards and positions, and which shape the organizational structures of society. Far from being limited to mental states, status beliefs convert into institutionalized social hierarchies (Blau 1977; Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). Indeed, to understand why inequalities persist despite ongoing economic and social change, sociologists have realized that it is vital to grasp the relationships between status beliefs and the material organization of resources and power (Ridgeway 2014). In fact, the idea that status inequality is rooted in the way institutions work and in the "linkage between psychological processes and social context" partially explains its stability over time (Pratto 1999, 200), for they "persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories" (Tilly 1998, 6). Institutions allocate resources and goods and are structured around organizational cultures (Tilly 1998) on much larger scales than individuals. They contribute to making inequalities *durable* and systemic.

In this framework, work and the way it is organized can be seen as centrally participating in the status dynamics of society, reflecting and actively reproducing them. By institutionalizing the differential allocation of jobs to social groups, "societies create and maintain group-based social dominance" (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, 150). According to Charles Tilly (1998), pervasive categorical inequalities – those concerning men/women, people who are black/white, rich/poor, and so on – powerfully affect the shape of the internal structures of all sorts of organization (Tilly 1998, 79). In fact, organizations "import" "exterior categories" of inequality that circulate throughout society (e.g., ritualized differences between men and women, black and white people, sex-typed occupations, etc.) and make them match their "interior categories" (e.g. manager/employee, secretary/director, etc.). This way, categorical inequalities contribute to creating contributive boundaries within organizations:

Exterior categories gain organizational importance when they coincide with interior categories – when, for example, an American steel mill recruits Polish immigrants for its blast furnaces and Irish immigrants for its handling of finished metal. With consequences that organizational managers often cannot foresee or control, such matching of exterior to interior categories builds whatever common knowledge and social relations are already linked with the exterior categorical pairs into the organization itself. (Tilly 1998, 79)¹³²

¹³² "Both interior and exterior categories play significant parts in the organization of work. At the continuum's interior end, the boundaries of firms, professions, trades, and industries come immediately to mind. But within firms organization charts provide cartoons of multiple categories: paired divisions, departments, pay grades, specialized clusters of jobs, and more. The unequal boundaries among them originate in exploitation, in the simultaneous enlistment of the subordinate category's effort and the exclusion of its members from the full value added by their effort." (Tilly 1998, 79)

For instance, new hotels reproduce the divisions of labor categorically organized around racial and gender boundaries, because they are already familiar to their employees due to previous experiences in other hotels (Tilly 1998, 96-97). Exterior categories are imported into organizations in two ways. First, members “ease their organizational work by mapping exterior categories to interior categories”. In Tilly’s example, female secretaries are assigned to male executives, thus importing a current exterior distinction into the firm “in a way that reduces the likelihood of a subordinate becoming the boss’s rival” (*exploitation*). Second, they draw on networks “categorically organized” in order to carry on their activities. For instance, workers search for jobs “through segregated networks” (i.e. due to chain migration), and employers tend to hire new workers by relying on the recommendations of existing employees, so that ultimately “an ethnically segregated niche forms within the firm” (*opportunity hoarding*) (Tilly 1998, 80-81). Since familiar organizational models tend to be preferred to unfamiliar ones, because they entail fewer change costs, work organizations tend to perpetuate existing contributive patterns, as I have called them, borrowing them from the outside¹³³. Thus, it is not most essentially a matter of rational efficiency, but rather of greater familiarity with certain structural models¹³⁴:

The more unfamiliar the design, in general, the greater these costs. In response to such costs, managers and other members of work organizations generally prefer familiar models, including categorical models, for work contracts. They readily incorporate existing social structure into their organizations. Most organizations therefore take shape and change not as efficiency-driven designs but as mosaics of established models and exterior social structures. (Tilly 1998, 80)

While preventing possible organizational alternatives, categorical inequalities allow to advance with the status quo. They constitute practical solutions to organizational problems, borrowing from existing patterns. Changes occur when the costs of maintaining the familiar models outnumber the benefits of doing so. According to Tilly, besides the lower costs of emulating pre-existing and familiar organizational models, categorical inequalities persist in organizations also because they facilitate exploitation and opportunity hoarding from the most favored members of organizations (Tilly 1998, 81-82)¹³⁵. Thus, it must be clear at this point why, according to Tomaskovic-Devey, “if as a society we are to directly challenge sex and racial segregation and the resulting inequalities, we will have to do it in workplaces” (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 3).

¹³³ “Those who run an organization have considerable capacity to redefine its interior categories, but much less power to reshape its exterior categories.” (Tilly 1998, 77)

¹³⁴ “Matching interior with exterior categories reinforces inequality inside the organization that does the matching. The creation of a well-marked interior boundary itself facilitates exploitation and opportunity hoarding by providing explanations, justifications, and practical routines for unequal distribution of rewards. But matching such an interior boundary with an exterior categorical pair such as white/black or citizen/foreigner imports already established understandings, practices, and relations that lower the cost of maintaining the boundary. It borrows potent scripts and common knowledge.” (Tilly 1998, 76)

¹³⁵ Exploitation is defined as the situation in which “some well-connected group of actors controls a valuable, labor-demanding resource from which they can extract returns only by harnessing the effort of others, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort” (Tilly 1998, 87). Here, categorical boundaries separate the beneficiaries from others and, in general, facilitate exploitation from subordinate populations, allowing the members of a superior category to ensure a command structure, sharing benefits within the elite (Tilly 1998, 87). Opportunity hoarding, by contrast, is a mechanism complementing exploitation that chiefly relies upon exclusion: “when members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a resource that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, (...) they regularly hoard their access to the resource, creating beliefs and practices that sustain their control. (...) Beneficiaries do not enlist the efforts of outsiders but instead exclude them from access to the relevant resources” (Tilly 1998, 91). For an interesting criticism of Charles Tilly’s theory, which presents some functionalist aspects of explanation, see Erik Olin Wright 2015.

1.2.1. *The “Status Circle”*

From these few insights taken from sociological research, we may draw the conclusion that labor hierarchies are not simply neutrally determined by reasons of rational efficiency. Familiar organizational patterns are adopted also because they facilitate exploitation and opportunity hoarding by the most advantaged groups at the expense of others, through mechanisms of emulation and adaptation.

Donald Tomaskovic-Devey recalls Max Weber’s concepts of *status closure* and *status composition* in order to highlight that the ways in which labor markets function and the concrete ways in which work is organized are deeply influenced by status hierarchies (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 6). Status closure refers to the exclusion of certain groups from some socially valued occupations. In Parkin’s words, social closure is “the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles” (Parkin 1982, 44). Status composition refers rather to “the process by which the typical sex or race of a class of jobs in workplaces becomes a fundamental aspects of the jobs, influencing the work done as well as the organizational evaluation of the worth of the work”. That is to say, the better the job, the more likely it is that the highest status groups will take it; conversely, the more a job is taken by low status groups, the more it is devalued and deskilled. These two processes generate racial and sex segregation and workplace inequalities (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 6). Let us now consider the status circle in two stages: in hiring, and while at work.

One’s status still plays a determining role in the hiring process; despite the fact it has been illegal for many years, a high number of employers still admit to being unwilling to hire members of low status groups (Bendick 2007; Pratto 1999). Studies have shown that, when applying for the same jobs, pairs of job-seekers who have identical credentials, skills, recommendations and professional experience, end up being distinguished by status judgments. Those from low status groups are far less likely to be interviewed and to be hired than job-seekers from high status groups (Pratto 1999, 202; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). The concept of “statistical discrimination” refers to the fact that employers’ hiring preferences reflect ideas about the characteristics of men and women in general (Hinze 2007). Many jobs are “encoded with notions of sex and race that label them as “appropriate” or “inappropriate” for members of racial/ethnic and gender groups” (Hinze 2007, 619):

The queuing process reserves the best jobs (e.g., those with higher pay, job security, and autonomy) for the most-favored groups (e.g., white males). Members of less-favored groups (e.g., women and racial/ethnic minorities) are consigned to the lower-paying jobs with less security and autonomy. (Hinze 2007, 619)

The idea of *contributive inequality* is thus intimately linked with that of *status inequality*. Socially subordinate groups are “systematically harmed” by these social expectations and beliefs, which end up being embedded into social behaviors and institutions (Pratto 1999, 202).

An investigation of labor relations is exceptionally well-suited to revealing the way social status dynamics work at various scales: the household, companies and corporations, states, up to the global chains of value (see Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Borghi, Dorigatti, and Greco 2017). In the most classic example, in the household status shapes the division of labor between men and women. Women are socially expected to perform most of the carework,

while men are socially expected to be “breadwinners”, and thus a smaller share of tasks for the reproduction of the household is expected from them. Social expectations applying to different social categories produce what we may refer to as *contributive patterns*. Social rewards and sanctions follow if these implicit rules are either fulfilled or broken.

In companies and corporations, the division of labor is vertically structured along a hierarchy that reflects a broader division between task-conceivers and task-executors within organizations. Whereas hierarchies are not intrinsically wrong (I will address the issue later), this may nonetheless give rise to relevant social status considerations. As Yves-Pierre Néron highlights, “the hierarchical design of our economic organizations is not socially benign in that it rather effectively transforms command hierarchies into broader status hierarchies and hierarchies in respect” (Néron 2015, 13). This statement, as I showed earlier, is widely supported by sociological literature, widely known as the “status conversion mechanism”. Being structured in hierarchies, labor organizations function as conversion contexts that translate contributive differentials into status inequalities, and vice versa.

Therefore, categorical inequalities which shape the way work is organized first and foremost constitute status inequalities. They reflect scales of the perceived worth of occupations as well as of the perceived worth of the individuals who perform them (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, 150). *Our occupation shapes our social standing. However, our social standing in turn co-determines what occupations we are more likely to do. Thus, status inequalities are somewhat circularly involved in labor structures.* This means that while one’s social status affects one’s access to occupations (as when, for example, a woman is seen as more suited to certain occupational roles, such as being a secretary or childcare), one’s occupational position also has effects on one’s social status in turn (e.g. working in cleaning occupations is generally associated with low social standing). Low social status makes it far more likely for a worker to enter low-ranked occupations, and working in these low-ranked occupations itself solidifies one’s low position in the social hierarchy. Likewise, persons from minority groups are at consistently higher risk of being unemployed than white people (Mason 2006, 112). As Goran Therbörn once stressed in a different context, “some people are more unemployed than others” (1986). Status inequalities tend to structure occupational hierarchies in that status affects hiring decisions and the roles that people are more likely to occupy based on their status, up to the very “organizational regimes” (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012; Néron 2015). Once again, this is not merely due to the personal preferences of the individuals involved. Organizational structures embed status-biased patterns of exclusion and exploitation (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993)¹³⁶.

We may refer to this phenomenon as the “*status circle*”. This concept highlights that status inequalities are strengthened and reproduce occupational hierarchies, and that occupational hierarchies tend to strengthen and reproduce status inequalities in turn. Occupational hierarchies have a status dimension in that the rungs of the labor ladder tend to be tied to those of ladders of perceived social worth of occupations and of the people that perform them.

1.2.2. *Status Dilemmas*

¹³⁶ “Discrimination is not something perpetuated solely by racist or sexist individuals but is fundamentally conditioned by the competition for the best jobs. Inequality is not only the result of discrimination against women or minorities but also of the gendered and racial organization of production itself.” (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 6)

The social division of labor involves a scale of tasks and roles which corresponds to a scale of socially perceived worth. There is usually a match between the perceived worth of *individuals* according to their social traits, and the perceived worth of the *roles* they perform in the division of labor. People usually carry expectations concerning the “auxiliary traits properly associated with many of the specific positions” in our society (Hughes 2017 [1958], 106). Such expected auxiliary traits circulate in culture and ordinary talk through “embodied stereotypes” and informal codes (Hughes 2017 [1958], 108). The male white surgeon and the black gatekeeper are examples.

Where the expected traits and roles don’t match, there occurs what the sociologist Everett Hughes calls a “*status dilemma*”, which I will explain the meaning of shortly. As a consequence, socially low regarded occupations are often reserved for socially low regarded individuals. If at the bottom of the status hierarchy societies put migrants, racialized people, women, and the poor, then individuals with these social traits are more likely to have a place on the lowest rungs of the ladder of labor, and obtain the less desired occupations. By contrast, people that occupy the highest ranks of the status hierarchy are more likely to get the most desired positions in the labor hierarchy. The way itself in which the division of labor is structured, tends to reflect and reproduce social status hierarchies. The phenomenon of the “status dilemmas” accurately described by Everett Hughes (2017 [1958]; 1974) is thus particularly interesting here. As I recalled earlier, status is a norm concerning how people should behave and be treated. In the world of work, this means that status acts as a norm concerning the expected traits of workers in occupations.

Status dilemmas occur when the expected traits of professionals do not match their actual traits. A “black doctor” or “woman engineer” provide common examples of status contradictions (Hughes 2017 [1958], 142-149; 1971; Kantzara 2016). A patient, in fact, is likely to see the black doctor as violating the status norm that associates the role of being a doctor with being a white person. Hughes observes that societies respond to status dilemmas and to the “status pain” related to them (Hughes 2017 [1958], 50) through *segregation*, which is pursued either by putting out of sight individuals who do not comply with status expectations (for instance, by preventing customers from coming into contact with them) or by leading such individuals to occupations that are expected to best suit their status: “for example, a black sociologist would teach race studies and a woman engineer design household appliances” (Kantzara 2016; Hughes 1971). And again, the black doctor will be more likely to have black patients (Hughes 2017 [1958], 113). The aim of these solutions is to prevent the status-dilemma bearers from being in troublesome situations. The phenomenon of “self-selection” has also been highlighted as a response to status dilemmas, which is a cognitive response that leads individuals of low-status groups to avoid occupations that may bring role conflicts and status inconsistencies (Merton 1966; Kantzara 2016). Before exploring the segregational response to status dilemmas, let us reflect for a moment on the socio-psychological basis of self-selection.

The idea of self-selection recalls the essential fact that status biases and their institutionalization end up being internalized by individuals. Indeed, they “affect the confidence and energy with which people put themselves forward in a situation” (Ridgeway 2014) thereby limiting “people’s sense of the possible” (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014; Bourdieu 2016 [1979]). The idea of constraints on people’s sense of the possible has a concrete meaning: people’s interiorization of status hierarchies pre-emptively circumscribes what they believe it

is legitimate to *claim*. This is why low status groups are more likely to “make few claims of respect and resources and their claims are less likely to be ratified by more powerful actors” (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). For instance, there is evidence that women propose lower starting wages than men (Säve-Söderbergh 2007): a status-related “cognitive barrier” entails that “gender impacts the content of the original claim as well as its legitimacy when women make ambitious claims”. This is the “interactional basis for both exploitation and opportunity-hoarding” (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014).

Let us turn now to the phenomenon of status segregation described by Everett Hughes. In the first case, segregation is pursued through strategies of invisibilization. In the second case, segregation is pursued through a differential allocation of positions.

1.2.3. *Invisibilization*

We have seen that it is in the nature of status that it is “acted upon” others, requiring an audience¹³⁷. It is to the “eyes of the community” that workers address their “*claims to be someone of worth*” (Hughes 2017 [1958]), for it is the community that dispenses social esteem. It is thus clear what invisibilizing work may mean. In what has been called “the social drama of work” (Hughes 2017 [1958], 46), making work invisible essentially means *robbing it of the possibility of an audience – and, thus, of social worth*. Given that status rankings are tied to scales of socially attributed worth, making work invisible is a way to maintain it at the lowest rung of the status ladder.

It is no surprise, then, that the lowest ranked occupations are also the most invisible forms of work. A typical example is that of family work: it is invisible, because it is confined to the household, within the private sphere, but also because it is poorly valued and invisibilized by publicly circulated normative definitions of what counts as “work”. However, note that hidden labor is not merely that which occupies a place outside of the formal employment relationship (see Crain et al. 2016 for a typology). The example that I discussed in Chapter II of crowdwork is particularly suited to demonstrating what invisible work means, where human labor is hidden behind the idea of “Automated Artificial Intelligence” by crowdsourcing platforms. This hidden human work directly translates into bad pay, no social protection, and exploitation. If something is not seen, its “claims of worth” obviously lack of audience, and thus also the possibility of political support.

Thus, invisibilizing work means treating the workers of a particular group as socially unequal, thereby perpetuating an odious form of status inequality. The metaphor of “not seeing” should not be understood only literally, but also as a symbolic concept which has relevant consequences also for the possibility of changing status structures: if work is not seen, it is hard to gain political consideration¹³⁸.

There are many ways in which work can be made invisible. I discern here three types of invisibilization as examples of status segregation:

¹³⁷ “One of the most important things about any man is his audience, or his choice of the several available audiences to which he may address his claims to be someone of worth. (...) A man’s work is one of the more important parts of his social identity, of his self” (Hughes 2017 (1958), 42-43).

¹³⁸ “If workers themselves do not see their efforts as valuable work, they are less likely to organize, appeal for public support, or challenge their working conditions through the legal system. Even if they want to mobilize, the invisibility of their work – and in many cases, of the workers themselves – may make it difficult for them to gain political traction or support from consumers. (...) If the state and legal systems do not acknowledge the labor, it will not be addressed in policy and law.” (Crain et al 2016, 5)

1. *Conceptual invisibilization.* A sphere of activities may not fit the normative definition of what counts as “work”, and thus will not be seen as “work” at all. As John W. Budd recalls, the adage “*the eye sees what the mind knows*” effectively highlights the idea that “we see and value work only when it conforms to our mental models of what work is” (Budd 2016, 28). Narrow definitions exclude a wide range of occupations from being included in the normative idea of what counts as work – they are denied the status of work itself. This way, what we normally *expect* to be “real work” affects what is actually *seen* to be work. Of course, this does not mean that everything should count as work. Rather, this should make us aware that the boundaries between work and not-work are the subjects of continuous redefinition and reshaping.
2. *Managerial invisibilization.* Work can be made invisible also through “managerial strategies to erase, transform, or digitize” the worker (Budd 2016), as happens in virtual work and heteromation discussed in Chapter II. Making work invisible in this sense results from the economic interest in paying low wages and avoiding the legal obligations that work requires. What cannot be seen can hardly be sanctioned.
3. *Spatial segregation.* Work can also be invisibilized through spatial segregation. A typical example is the case of janitors who clean offices while workers are away (Crain et al. 2016, 20). When janitorial tasks need to be performed during working hours, “workers are expected to do them quickly and with minimal interruption to higher-level workers” (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 51). This spatial and temporal separation makes these workers “seem like members of separate castes; they do not even see their contributions as comparable” (Sayer 2009, 102).

Consider domestic servants in the XIX century, when:

backdoor servants’ entrances, hidden from public view, began to be used in American homes. The layout of rooms was designed to make servants as invisible as possible. (...) Sliding doors and pantries separated dining rooms from kitchens, and kitchens, where the “help” once worked for servants alone, where they prepared the meals they served to the family in a separate dining room. (...) Physical separation and quiet habits made servants less conspicuous, but – except where some servants in large households never entered the family area – it was impossible for them to be completely invisible. Nor would employers necessarily have wanted this, for it would have precluded that visible deference that some employers thought appropriate (Muirhead 2004, 81-82).

Status segregation took the shape of spatial segregation, even in the way that homes themselves were designed. It has been observed that tasks that have to do with the physical preservation of the environment, such as security work¹³⁹, are more likely to go to people of color. Whereas workers performing the gatekeeping function “use the visibility of their bodies to restrict access to the physical space, workers performing other kinds of labor must be largely invisible to clients and to other workers”. This ends up perpetuating their invisibility in the organizational structure (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 60-61).

¹³⁹ “Security personnel are more likely to be people of color. They literally are required to use their bodies as a physical barrier between those for whom the space was created and those who do not belong there. Essentially, security and reception personnel are the gatekeepers of these organizational structures. This gatekeeping function inevitably has a raced component. Potential entrants to the space are screened so that people who do not fit the profile of the organization are excluded. Those who tend to be excluded from the space often share racial and socioeconomic characteristics with the security and reception staff.” (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 60)

Conceptual invisibilization, managerial invisibilization, and spatial segregation are overlapping examples of the ways in which work can be made invisible by drawing on, and perpetuating in turn, status inequalities. Conceptual invisibilization indirectly attributes low social worth to clusters of activities by defining work in such a way so as to exclude them from the sphere of recognized work. Managerial invisibilization devalues certain forms of work in order to reduce their costs. Spatial segregation reflects hierarchies of standing between occupations. These examples show how status inequalities and scales of worth are deeply involved in the division of labor.

1.2.4. *Occupational Segregation*

Occupational segregation is generally defined as the differential distribution of women and men, black and whites, across different occupations and places of work (Hinze 2007, 617). Such differential distribution is not merely “horizontal”. High status groups tend to take the most desirable jobs, while less desired jobs tend to be reserved for low status groups. While there is no single factor which explains segregation, and the debate on this traces back to the 70s, key factors identified are “in no particular order, comparative biological advantages, underinvestment in human capital (schooling or training), differential income roles, preferences and prejudices, socialization and stereotypes, entry barriers and organizational practices” (Bettio and Verashchagina 2009, 8; see also Bettio, Verashchagina, Mairhuberand Kanjuo-Mrčela 2009).

All of this is far from applying only to the pre-Civil rights era, when occupational segregation was legally pursued in the United States. Contemporary statistics are clear. Women are underrepresented in higher-status occupations: according to U.S. data, they make up 9,7% of engineers, 32,6% of physicians, and 31,8 % of dentists. However, they are “overrepresented in traditionally female professions that have also historically been accorded less status”: 98,4% of daycare and kindergarten teachers, 91% of nurses, 81,5 % of school teachers are women (Hinze 2007). In Europe, data from 2013-2014 show that personal care workers are 10% men and 90% women, and women make up 84,5% and 81,7% of cleaners and clerks respectively (EIGE 2017, 20) all of which are low prestige and badly paid occupations. These data do not, however, take into account forms of work that lie outside of the formal contract. Reports from the European Commission show that occupational segregation has tended to be strikingly stable over the last two decades (EIGE 2017; Bettio and Verashchagina 2009).

Recently, there has been a trend towards *intraoccupational sex segregation* (or “reseggregation”) which indicates, at least, that even though women have almost achieved equality in medical degrees, male physicians are still far more likely to become surgeons and be employed in lucrative private practices, while female physicians are more likely to become pediatricians and to work in less lucrative practices (Hinze 2007, 617). In general, not only are women underrepresented in higher-paying occupations, but in occupations where the participation of women is higher, both men and women earn less than in those dominated by men. As a result, “women also experience cumulative economic disadvantage over the life course” (Hinze 2007, 619). For instance, occupational segregation lowers chances of promotion and career prospects, and “location in occupations with less income, authority, and prestige also decreases the amount of power women hold in both public and private realms”

(Hinze 2007, 619). One of the most important theorists of occupational segregation, Joan Acker (1974; 1990), considers organizations as “gendered structures” ordered by implicit expectations about which workers are best suited to which jobs. The consequence is that the higher status workers tend to be slotted into better paid and higher prestige jobs¹⁴⁰.

Therefore, labor hierarchies tend to reflect status hierarchies: “the better the job, the more black men, white women, and black women are excluded, and the more a job is filled by black women, white women, or black men, the more it is devalued and deskilled by employers” (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 6; see also Branch 2011). The “status circle” is pervasively reproduced by occupational segregation.

Indeed, it turns out that:

jobs that have high prestige and power over other workers, that are relatively autonomous, and that provide career ladders and skill training are all more likely to be filled by white men. (...) Sex and racial segregation are profoundly linked to the quality of jobs. (...) Racial and gender segregation are intertwined with the very fabric of work, influencing not only the allocation of people to jobs but the character of jobs and workplaces themselves. They are organizational processes (...). Jobs can have gender. There are black jobs. (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 3)

Racial inequalities are involved in these processes as well. The way racial minorities enter the labor market is highly segregating due to “employer preferences, structural discrimination, job queues, differential access to social networks” (Wingfield and Skeete 2016, 47). The consequence is that racial minorities are concentrated in badly paid and low status jobs (Acker 1990; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). According to Wingfield and Skeete, organizational hierarchies are “imbued with racialized meanings that impact practices, behaviors, and actions” within the organization, which are often unspoken and invisible (2016, 48). White people tend to be concentrated at the highest levels of organizations, whereas people of color tend to have jobs with fewer responsibilities, and their responsibilities tend to be connected with their status, for example they are asked to supervise other racial minorities or manage “diversity programs” (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 49). Companies may also find people of color useful in order to give an image of equity and fairness despite their racialized practices (when it concerns women, this is usually referred to as “pinkwashing”) (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 52). Low status workers in organizations can thus be encouraged to participate in the organizational culture that implicitly undermines them.

Note that occupational segregation is not limited to gender and race, but extends also to class and the way it is socially perceived (Sayer 2005, 14 ff.; Ridgeway 2014). It is interesting to note that current equal opportunities policies often mention one’s race, age, and ethnicity, but not class¹⁴¹. Interestingly, in studies of the social perception of the relative weight of these categories, it was widely believed that sex and race are aspects rooted in the body, whereas it is thought that class can be “achieved” and is thus less questionable (Ridgeway 2014). In the workplace, there are implicitly classed rules governing access:

In institutions in which gateway encounters occur, the dominant actors—doctors, educators, managers, professionals—are overwhelmingly middle class. As a result, these institutions’

¹⁴⁰ “To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to an ongoing process, conceived as gender neutral. Rather it is an integral part of the process.” (Acker 1990, 46).

¹⁴¹ Andrew Sayer (2005) notes that while capitalism could cope with gender and race equality, it could not cope with the removal of class. However, it seems that gender and race inequality are essential too (see for instance Fraser 2014).

workplace cultures and practices are infused with the implicit but distinctive assumptions, values, and taken-for-granted knowledge of the middle class. This, itself, is an example of how class status, as status, not merely control of resources and power, becomes embedded in organizational structures of resources and power. (...) They create a context in which the implicit interactional rules are better understood and more familiar to middle-class petitioners (e.g., job applicants, patients, and students) than to working-class ones (Bourdieu 1984; Stephens et al. 2012). This knowledge difference reinforces the presumed competence differences evoked by class status bias (Ridgeway and Fisk 2012). (Ridgeway 2014)¹⁴²

Occupational segregation works both horizontally and vertically. It has a powerful impact on the access to the top positions available to low-status groups. The low representation of low-status groups in positions of authority and responsibility is a widely documented phenomenon known as the “glass ceiling” (see for example “Federal Glass Ceiling Commission” 1995; Cook and Glass 2013). This phenomenon excludes low-status groups from access to top positions, thereby leading them to “stagnant careers”, for they are prevented from growing professionally (Maume 1999, 486).

A traditional explanation of the glass ceiling is that “similar prefers similar”. In her classic work, Kanter (1977) shows that managers prefer to interact with workers who share their background and life experience, so as to build alliances and rely upon them later. Therefore, since women and people of color are perceived as different, they are overlooked for the highest positions. Network and associational preferences thus work as internalized patterns of preference for socially similar persons. We can thus clearly see the impact of what Scanlon calls “associational goods” (2018) on contributive patterns.

Maume’s study (1999) on the impact of occupational segregation by gender and race on career prospects has found relevant differences in access to top positions:

After 12 years, 56% of White men will be waiting for a promotion, meaning that 44% will have been promoted and exited the risk set. By contrast, after 12 years, 83% of Black men, 85% of White women, and 93% of Black women remain in the risk set waiting for a promotion. Moreover, these curves should be viewed in light of Rosenbaum’s (1979) finding that an early promotion (in the first 3 to 5 years) is essential for receiving promotions later in the career. In this sample, 21% of White men had received a managerial promotion by the end of the fifth year, compared with less than 10% of Black men, Black women, and White women. (Maume 1999, 501)¹⁴³

Sidanius and Pratto (1999) have called these organizations “hierarchy-enhancing institutions”, in that they perpetuate social stratification based on status with the help of “hierarchy-enhancing legitimation myths” (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Néron 2015). Once again, status beliefs are circulated through attitudes and behaviors resulting in organizational inequalities, and are sustained by myths and legitimating rationalizations.

2. What’s Wrong with Labor-Related Status Inequality?

¹⁴² Consider the “example of medical visits between middle-class and working-class parents and children: whereas the middle-class mother taught her son not only to answer the doctors’ questions but also to ask questions in return, which allowed the doctor to learn more about the child’s habits and needs, the working-class mother looked intimidated by the doctor’s higher status, thus she and her soon gave far fewer information to the doctor. As a result, having richer information, the doctor was able to give a more accurate feedback about the child’s health from the middle-class background, and limited feedback to the working class one” (Lareau 2002; Ridgeway 2014).

¹⁴³ The “glass escalator” is the advantage of the highest status group when entering an occupation dominated by low-status representatives (Williams 1992).

In the previous section, I briefly reviewed the sociological literature on status inequalities, paying particular attention to how issues of labor are involved and affected. Sociology has much to say on the topic, even if the issue has benefited from comparatively less consideration than inequalities in income and wealth (Ridgeway 2014). As for political philosophers, the attention they give to status inequality appears to be low when compared to the pervasiveness and relevance of the issue. Status inequalities in labor relations have been addressed by few authors, since most literature on labor justice focuses on issues like workplace democracy and meaningful work, whereas most literature on relational equality tends to focus on sophisticated, competing definitions of what social equality means.

Exceptions include Iris Marion Young, Elizabeth Anderson, Thomas Scanlon, and some other authors recently reflecting on workplace democracy (Néron 2015). Iris Marion Young introduced the relational perspective into her work in her powerful criticisms of the distributive paradigm, with respect to the division of labor (Young 1990; 2006)¹⁴⁴. Elizabeth Anderson, in her important article of 1999, devotes some reflections to the relational issues at stake in the division of labor, suggesting the notion of “joint production”, which is particularly relevant in this framework (Anderson 1999). In her most recent publication *Private Government* (2017), Anderson also uses crucial relational tools to address inequality in power and status in the workplace. In his recent publication *Why Does Inequality Matter?* Thomas Scanlon provides some insights on income inequalities assessed through a relational grid (Scanlon 2018). Despite these sporadic insights, aside from the work of Young and Anderson, there has not been adequate development of relational concerns about labor justice. The aim of this section is to fill in this gap, attempting to conceptualize *what workers are owed in terms of social equality* by drawing on the work of relational egalitarians and the sociology of status and work. Relational egalitarianism may help us to specify the reasons and ways in which social status norms highlighted by sociological research should be normatively assessed. Thus, my aim is to investigate the consequences of relational ideas with respect to work, in order to conceptualize the relational dimension of labor justice. I will address here some key proposals in the debates on these perspectives and suggest a typology of concepts that should be included in a relational dimension of justice.

Some general normative considerations may be drawn from these sociological insights, which I anticipate as follows. First, if status is a social norm rooted in biasing beliefs, then it lacks adequate justification and should be subject to public scrutiny for change. Second, status inequalities relating to the division of labor should be considered as involving both the interactional level (*no one should be treated as an “inferior” because of one’s position in the division of labor*) and the structural level (*certain positions should not be reserved for certain people in the division of labor in virtue of their status*). Third, status inequalities structurally embedded in the division of labor are objectionable because they prevent people from contributing to social cooperation as peers, and in so doing indirectly treat them as inferiors. Different remedies to labor-related status inequalities will then be discussed: elimination, compensation, affirmative recognition and normative differentiation. Affirmative and transformative strategies against status inequalities will then be distinguished. I will argue that rather than focusing on individual behaviours, the relational dimension of labor justice should primarily focus on structural status inequalities. Putting our focus in this direction, the joint consideration of

¹⁴⁴ I am including Young among the relational egalitarians because it is in this tradition that her contribution has mostly been acknowledged, but this does not mean that she is not considered as part of the critical theory tradition.

Nancy Fraser's model of justice and relational egalitarianism will turn out to be particularly helpful.

2.1. *Status as an Unscrutinized Norm: Against Status Determinism and the Naturalistic Division of Labor*

As an irreflexive social norm rooted in biased beliefs, status it is not justified: it should thus be subject to critical scrutiny and change.

Since status is a norm rooted in biasing beliefs lying outside of critical scrutiny then, first, it is the outcome of irreflexive socio-historical processes (see also Appiah 2010) and it is not justified by a natural or supernatural order; second, it can therefore be challenged and changed.

Denying the historical nature of status inequalities and thus believing that status norms are somewhat inherently and naturally justified, would be to hold that people of lower-classes, women, and people of color are naturally suited to performing certain tasks and naturally fit certain roles, and that their place in the division of labor is justified by "real differences". A theory of the differential capacities of social groups would sustain this view. Such a theory would argue that if women are reserved for the low positions in occupational hierarchies and for most carework, this is justified by the essence of femininity or by their objective lack of certain capacities. On this view, if racialized people are reserved for the less desired tasks, this is because of their inferior capacity to fulfil other, more desired tasks; perhaps they cannot perform certain tasks that require less supervision and more self-direction because they lack the capacities of morally autonomous agents. If people from the lowest classes occupy the lowest rungs of the labor ladder, this is because they are naturally suited to the positions that accompany them: they have perhaps not been able to emancipate themselves from their low-ranked positions because they lack some fundamental capacities that, by contrast, are possessed by the high-ranked. Call this the *naturalistic conception of the division of labor*. It states that the way the division of labor is structured is grounded in natural rankings among people. In short, on this view the low-ranked are less valuable than the high-ranked and thus should occupy the lowest ranks.

The naturalistic conception of the division of labor is not new. For centuries it worked as a powerful legitimating tool for slavery. Classical authors often explained social inequalities in naturalistic terms. The master-servant relationship has been considered "natural" by many thinkers: "what cements the bond between master and servant is the sense that each is naturally fit to a different rank, and the respective ranks are linked by reference to a larger hierarchical order" (Muirhead 2004, 79). Aristotle believed that some people were naturally suited to being slaves, whereas others were suited to contemplation (*Politics*). Likewise, men and women were hierarchically ranked by nature, and the same view was held by barbarians and Greeks. According to Plato, the division of labor embodied the natural inequality of humanity (*The Republic*). One group was worthier than the other and thus legitimately ruled over it.

Such assumptions collapsed when the idea that all humans are equal disrupted old orders in the new political vocabulary of the Revolution. If all human beings are equal, no justification by God or nature can be provided to support a naturalistic conception of the division of labor

– which, therefore, could be challenged. The idea started to spread of an original state of nature where all human beings were equal, before civilization corrupted them. Alternative explanations of social inequality came to the fore: according to Rousseau, social inequality emerged from the invention of private property, whereas according to other authors, it was due to the division of labor. As Dahrendorf has compellingly shown, the causal relation between property and status has been historically falsified by the experience of the Soviet Union, where the relative abolition of private property co-existed with highly unequal social rankings. As for the division of labor, it does not *by itself* explain why people have more or less prestige in the eyes of the community: “from the point of view of the division of labour (...), there is no difference in rank between the director-general, the typist, the foreman, the fitter and the unskilled labourer of an enterprise” (Dahrendorf 1972, 94). In order for these roles to be seen as unequally ranked, there must be an act of evaluation – which is mediated by the irreflexive beliefs explored in the previous section.

The naturalistic conception of the division of labor is far from being a bad memory. Far more recently, in *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) argue that there is a natural ordering of work that reflects genetically determined intellectual abilities. Logically speaking, nothing in the naturalistic view of the division of labor prevents us from believing that those of superior rank are entitled “to inflict violence on inferiors, to exclude or segregate them from social life, to treat them with contempt, to force them to obey, work without reciprocation, and abandon their own cultures” (Anderson 1999, 312). After all, if one is naturally superior to another, why should the inferior deserve respect? Such views respond to “the disadvantaged by branding them as stupid, ugly or talentless”, as Elizabeth Anderson says about luck egalitarianism (Anderson 1999). This not only fundamentally conflicts with our intuitive moral views about the equal moral worth of all people, but it is also inconsistent with the sociological evidence that shows there is nothing natural in the way organizations are currently structured: rather, social rankings crystallize beliefs and normative expectations, through emulative and adaptive mechanisms that facilitate the exploitation and opportunity hoarding committed by the highest-ranked groups at the expense of the low-ranked (Tilly 1998). Rejecting the idea that current social rankings embedded in organizations reflect differences in the intrinsic worth of persons means acknowledging the morally arbitrary nature of social rankings.

Furthermore, acknowledging that, as a norm, status escapes public scrutiny, status is potentially robbed of its legitimating role for other inequalities: it can no longer justify inequalities in power, resources, and labor. Thus, a counterfactual idea of equality in social relations of work – both interactionally and structurally understood – may be envisaged. Such an idea would impede us from considering one’s social status as a natural trait and, thus, remove the justification for one’s position in the division of labor on these grounds. More broadly, status should not determine people’s “occupational fate” (Hughes 2017 [1958]): against the *status determinism* of the naturalistic conception division of labor, all should be able to contribute to social cooperation as peers.

2.2. *Interactional and Structural Status Inequalities*

Status inequalities relating to the division of labor should be reduced both at the interactional and at the structural level.

Drawing on sociological research, I have highlighted the way status’ “implicit rules” shape job allocation and the way organizations themselves are structured. In some cases, people’s relative positions in the division of labor leads more or less directly to stigmatizing differences in social status. Additionally, as highlighted earlier, status beliefs are not only psychological issues, since as an aggregate result they shape the way our organizations are structured and, more generally, the way the division of labor is organized. This does not mean that the psychological side of the story has no interest. On the contrary, it is in the day-to-day interactions, where psychological phenomena have effects, that status beliefs and norms are propagated and acquire the force of a “shared reality”, thereby providing the interactional basis of more institutionalized status inequalities (Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; 2014; Ridgeway 2016). At the normative level, such attitudes express the counterfactual idea that *social hierarchies* do not have a purely organizational meaning: they do not embody merely efficient responses to cooperative problems – they also tend to reflect socially established scales of worth among people.

Relational egalitarianism, thus, may offer a normative perspective against *interactionally reproduced status inequalities* as well as against *status inequalities embedded in, or elicited by, the division of labor*. Call the former *interactional status inequality* and the latter *structural status inequality*. These two forms of status inequality can only be artificially distinguished, for they are deeply intertwined, as sociological research shows (see §1 in this chapter). I argue that both raise concerns of social equality in the division of labor. The distinction may help us better identify the ways in which social inequality relates to labor. It seems to me that relational egalitarians do not distinguish sufficiently between the two – that is, either they focus exclusively on interactional social inequality, or they also consider structural concerns but without sufficiently highlighting their structural nature. Let us address them in turn.

2.2.1. *Interactional Status Inequality*

Social equality at the interactional level requires that no one be treated as an “inferior” because of one’s role in the division of labor.

Utopias of social equality have been imagined by writers and philosophers for centuries. A world where all treat each other as equals, where no one is expected to bow, defer, or look down, where no titles are used and where people interact with each other without facing status barriers is an old dream. In *Homage to Catalonia* (1980 [1938]), in which George Orwell tells the story of his participation to Spain’s civil war against Franco, we can find an account of what “breathing the air” of “social equality” would be like:

General and private, peasant and militiaman, still met as equals; everyone drew the same pay, wore the same clothes, ate the same food, and called everyone else ‘thou’ and ‘comrade’; there was no boss-class, no menial-class, no beggars, no prostitutes, no lawyers, no priests, no boot-licking, no cap-touching. I was breathing the air of equality, and I was simple enough to imagine that it existed all over Spain. (Orwell 1980 [1938], 31)

Leaving aside pay, clothes, and food, which embody an example of Walzer’s “simple equality”, this account makes it clear that social equality lies in the elimination of social rankings and their *behavioral apparatus*. In the last few decades, philosophers from the egalitarian tradition

have revitalized this old intuition – defended by the English *Levellers* movement among others – that all of us are equal and this should shape the way in which we relate to one another (see Anderson 2017). I outlined earlier some of the key features of this debate (see Part II, Introduction).

Social inequalities are pervasive and “endemic” (Scheffler 2012). *Interactional* status inequality refers to the ‘micro-relationships’ and day-to-day interactions through which individuals express, one way or another, differential respect to each other. Status attitudes and behaviors perpetuate and consolidate status beliefs. Elizabeth Anderson and others have offered effective examples of social inequalities in interactions:

Consider three types or dimensions of social hierarchy: of authority, esteem, and standing. In a hierarchy of authority, occupants of higher rank get to order subordinates around. They exercise arbitrary and unaccountable power over their inferiors. In a hierarchy of esteem, occupants of higher rank despise those of inferior rank and extract tokens of deferential honor from them, such as bowing, scraping, and other rituals of self-abasement that inferiors display in recognition of the other’s superiority. In a hierarchy of standing, the interests of those of higher rank *count* in the eyes of the others, whereas the interests of inferiors do not: others are free to neglect them, and, in extreme cases, to trample upon them with impunity. Usually, these three hierarchies are joined. (Anderson 2017, 4)

Similar observations about the relationship between occupational hierarchies and the devaluation of the persons have been made by many authors (Walzer 1982; Young 1990; Sennett and Cobb 1972; Pateman 1970; Néron 2015). A person’s position in the division of labor as well as the tasks they perform are often motives for social devaluation (which may consist in the stigmatization of dirty workers and the low prestige given to certain occupations). Labor-related interactional status inequality may take many forms. Walzer’s “insolence of office” provides an example:

[The insolence of the office,] that is, the special claims that office holders commonly make, that they are entitled to their offices and then to the authority and status that go with their offices, because they have been tested and certified in accordance with socially approved standards. Office is their achievement, and it marks them off as superior to their fellow citizens. (Walzer 1983, 133)

The insolence of the office is the interactional basis of a more general status inequality between “professionals” and “nonprofessionals” (Walzer 1983; Young 1990). Likewise, actors in economic organizations tend to express typical behavioral patterns, such as showing deference towards superiors, or scorn, elitism and expressions of disdain towards subordinate members (Néron 2015, 13). Management studies have documented “attitudes of arrogance toward workers and citizens in general” by elite managers in relation to the 2008 financial crisis (Néron 2015; Conger 2005; James 2014).

Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb’s ethnographic study (1972) shows that workers tend to interpret the situation of “taking orders” as evidence of a lack of ability or merit, thereby identifying their positions in scales of social worth (Sennett and Coobb 1972; Dow 2003, 37). Unsurprisingly, such status-biased behaviors are associated with social suffering and high levels of stress among workers, who tend to internalize these beliefs displayed through self-deprecating attitudes (Néron 2015, 14; O’Neill 2010, 400; Pratto 1999). For instance, it has been documented that black job candidates who perceive negative expectations from white hirers tend to perform worse in interviews than when they are treated respectfully, as a response to the uncomfortable situation (Word, Zanna and Cooper 1974; see also Steele and

Aronson 1995). Another example of internalized self-deprecating attitudes is shown by Asian American workers who strive to disguise their accent in the workplace (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 55)¹⁴⁵. Where low-status groups are asked to participate in the organizational culture of high-status groups, Wingfield and Seeke found that there are interactional and physical ways in which what they refer to as “racialized labor” (Collins 1997) is perpetuated. Examples include black police officers that laugh at racist jokes in order to ingratiate themselves with their white colleagues (Bolton and Feagin 2004), as well as to make sure that white people feel comfortable with them, such as by “keeping silent when confronted with expressions of racial bias” (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 57). This is part of what has been called “racial identity work”¹⁴⁶.

Russell Muirhead observes that domestic service in the nineteenth century, where one person was at the service of the personal needs of others, raised problems of this kind. He highlights that domestic service in itself “is in tension with the self-respect that democracies admirably nourish” (Muirhead 2004, 72):

The subservient manners and appearance of servants could help support a family’s sense of generalized superiority. This feeling of superiority might be important for those who had given part of themselves over to the pleasures of domination. But even more crucial, a sense of superiority could help a family justify the fact that it was being served, and combat the notion that the servants themselves might need servants. Habits of subservience and segregated entrances and workspaces symbolized a general inferiority by virtue of which servants were thought not to need or deserve the same attention to their health, the same rest, or the same leisure as the families they served. This measure of visible deference and subservience also established for servants that they worked for the family but were not members of it. When servants who were addressed by their first name were expected to use proper last names when addressing family members, when they wore distinguishing uniforms and practiced habits of obedience, they were reminded that their place was in the house but not in the family. (Muirhead 2004, 82)

As an interactional example of social inequality, deference served as a justificatory apparatus for structural social inequality (“a sense of superiority could help a family justify the fact that it was being served”). Deference was rooted in the very relationship between masters and servants. It reflected an aristocratic order casting “servants as lower, less complete, and less perfect than the nobles they serve” (Muirhead 2004, 79). In fact, servants were supposed to share in the masters’ excellence and nobility, and conversely, the masters deserved service because of their superior worth. This is a paradigmatic case of social inequality where attitudes of deference constitute the behavioral apparatus sustaining deeper social, political and economic differences. Unsurprisingly, women attempted to avoid domestic service as much as they could: if possible, they preferred the factory, because there “you know when you are done” (Cadbury, Matheson and Shann 1906). In domestic service, one woman said, “I had to be constantly in the presence of people who looked down upon me as an inferior” (Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 12; Muirhead 2004, 85).

What problem did domestic service pose for nineteenth-century Americans? One might cast it as simply economic: middle-class women seeking domestic help (...). But beneath this was a deeper issue: employers felt that they were *worthy* of service—that their needs were worthy enough to

¹⁴⁵ For a rich and inspiring account of contemporary forms of invisible labor, see Crain, Poster and Cherry 2016.

¹⁴⁶ “Doing the work of proving one’s capacities and feigning or hiding emotions about race-related situations is a part of everyday social interaction for minority workers and one that contributes to whites’ advantage within the organization.” (Wingfield and Seeke 2016, 57)

command the full-time service of others, even at the cost of displacing the independent needs of those performing the service. (Muirhead 2004, 73)

Domestic service has been defined by André Gorz as an occupation “that those who earn a good living transfer, to their advantage and without profits, to those for which there is no employment in the economy” (Gorz 2004, 23)¹⁴⁷. He also observes that service is the consequence of widespread inequality in society, where a part of the population hoards the well-paid activities while using other parts of the population as servants (Gorz 2004, 251)¹⁴⁸.

However, it is not necessary to go back to the nineteenth century in order to see the interactional ways in which social inequality circulates through shared beliefs and behaviors. The literature on workplace democracy has paid special attention to labor-related status attitudes, and taken them to constitute an argument in favor of extending authority to workers in companies (Bowles and Gintis 1993; Dow 2003; Pateman 1970; Anderson 2017). Gregory Dow has observed that authority relations in employment “are incompatible with membership in a community where persons are regarded as having equal worth” (Dow 2003, 34). Dow highlights that there is a danger that authority relations in the workplace may “be interpreted by both parties as expressing some larger truth about the relative social worth of the individuals involved”, whereas bosses in worker-controlled firms are accountable to subordinates in a way that “changes or at least clarifies the nature of the authority relationship”. By clarifying the nature of the authority relationship, accountability makes it harder for anyone to interpret authority as being rooted “in the relative social worth of the parties” (Dow 2003, 36). (Clearly, it follows that “it is unwise to express attitudes of scorn or contempt toward people who can fire you” (Dow 2003, 36)). The orders workers receive vary depending on their ranks:

Higher-ranked individuals may be granted considerable freedom in deciding how to carry out their orders, and may issue some orders to some inferiors. The most highly ranked individual takes no orders but issues many. The lowest-ranked may have their bodily movements and speech minutely regulated for most of the day. (Anderson 2017, 37)

To be sure, certainly not all authority relationships translate into a loss of self-respect, as Robert Nozick pointed out (1974, 246) – consider the case of musicians in a symphony orchestra. But as Dow observes in response to Nozick, one cannot draw an analogy between members of an orchestra and usual workers:

Workers do not generally have any rare skill widely respected by the rest of society (the orchestra); their situation is not clearly coercive (the draftees); and their subordination may not be temporary (the rising stars on a career track). Without special circumstances of this kind, it does appear true that there is a chronic tendency in authority relationships for respect to become unidirectional. (Dow 2003, 37)

In Dow’s view, in the absence of rare skills, clear coercion, and career prospects, authority relationships tend to ground *unreciprocal respect*.

These status attitudes cannot be adequately addressed by merely a distributive perspective. The ideal of social equality, however, may provide the tools to critically address them. In fact,

¹⁴⁷ My translation.

¹⁴⁸ “Le développement des services personnels n’est donc possible que dans un contexte d’inégalité sociale croissante, où une partie de la population accapare les activités bien rémunérées et contraint une autre partie au rôle de serviteur” (Gorz 2004, 251).

the basic norm of relational egalitarianism consists in an ideal of society where *all treat each other as equals* (Miller 1998, 32). As Elizabeth Anderson puts it, “By *egalitarian*, I refer to an ideal of social relations. To be an egalitarian is to command and promote a society in which its members interact as equals. This vague idea gets its shape by contrast with social hierarchy, the object of egalitarian critique” (Anderson 2017, 4). The core of the relational egalitarian demand is thus that people “interact as equals”, in opposition to social hierarchies of worth among people.

Note thus that social equality is mostly associated with an idea of interactions expressing respect or recognition to others; more precisely, “expressions of inferiority and superiority, indicated by both an evaluation and an expression of that evaluation” (Fourie 2012; 2015). This view is shared by most relational egalitarians (Wolff 1998; Schemmel 2011). What is wrong, to them, is the way people are treated in relationships between “superiors” and “inferiors”; broadly speaking, what they oppose are attitudes which are “either, on the one hand, noticeably flattering or deferential or approbatory or obsequious or, on the other hand, noticeably disparaging or deprecatory or insulting or humiliating” (Runciman 1967, 223). Thus from this perspective, expressions of scorn related to labor hierarchies are objectionable because they reflect an unequal treatment of people, dividing them up as “inferiors” and “superiors”.

It thus seems that most relational egalitarians tend to confine their concern for social equality to what I have been referring to as the *interactional* level; that is, they tend to be mostly interested in *expressions of respect and disrespect in one-to-one behaviors*. As I highlighted earlier, this is important because it is precisely through such interactions (Cecilia Ridgeway’s “small behaviors”) that status inequalities are reproduced and acquire the force of a “shared reality”, crystallizing at the structural level the way organizations are shaped. Therefore it may be concluded that *showing disrespect to others on the grounds of their position in the division of labor is objectionable because it fails to treat them as equals, and misconstrues their position in the division of labor as an indicator of their worth*. Status attitudes are incompatible with the ideal of social equality, and contributive inequalities do not justify status-biased attitudes of disrespect.

However, if the scope of social equality were restricted to the psychological-interactional level, the perspective would be too narrow, in that it would fail to address the institutionally embedded character of status in the division of labor, which plays the key role of perpetuating inequalities. Let us turn, thus, to what I have called structural status inequality.

2.2.2. *Structural Status Inequality*

Social equality at the structural level requires that positions in the division of labor are not reserved for certain people by virtue of their status, and that one’s position in the division of labor does not determine their social status.

Given the organizational embeddedness of unequal contributive patterns, a psychological perspective will not suffice to change them. The line of reasoning here follows the same pattern as that which shows that the theory of recognition fails to provide adequate tools to address status inequality in organizations. The models of work as self-transformation, the achievement principle, and the model of social integration, are weakly equipped for this

purpose. If properly developed, the model of equal social dignity and autonomy may be so equipped.

The central point is that *there can be objectionable social inequalities even in the absence of any explicit one-to-one disrespectful behaviors*. On this point, I disagree with Carina Fourie, who claims that social equality “is focused primarily on relationships, rather than institutions, could be used to highlight the inequalities between individuals which stem from their attitudes and everyday behaviour” (Fourie 2012, 117). Institutions also embody social relationships. A relational egalitarian perspective should not necessarily be seen as being restricted to the mere interactional level¹⁴⁹. Fourie’s distinction restricts the scope of relational egalitarianism to one-to-one interactions, but this ignores the role that structures play in shaping and reproducing patterns of social relations. In the theory, one should not give priority to individuals’ everyday interactions, and a subordinate role to the relational dimension of social structures. They are both highly relevant to normative considerations on social inequality.

Giving priority to the micro-interactional side overlooks the fundamental ways in which these two levels, the interactional and the structural, interact with and strengthen one another. Assigning priority in this way would prevent us from addressing some crucial ways in which status inequalities are reproduced. The institutionalization of status-biased interaction is concretely grounded in the way that work is organized, where low-status groups are assigned the less desired jobs. To put it differently, if some groups are systematically segregated such that they primarily occupy certain social positions, but are nonetheless treated with respect in everyday interactions, this façade of equal treatment alone will not meet the demands of social equality. *One could be treated in a respectful way by single individuals, while remaining occupationally segregated*, as shown by the case of the happy slave. One cannot draw normative conclusions from facts about people’s minds alone, without taking into account certain structural considerations. Therefore, relational egalitarians should not restrict their attention to the interactional level, but also consider the structures that reproduce status inequalities.

Taking the idea of the equal moral worth of persons seriously, one should extend the scope of the norm of “universal moral equality” (Anderson 1999, 313) beyond everyday behaviors and interactions, so as to include structures of work and the division of labor. One cannot realize the ideal of a society of equals, as envisaged by relational egalitarians, while there remains a division of labor shaped by status inequalities¹⁵⁰. Consider the example of nineteenth

¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Fourie pertinently problematizes her own assertion: “The high emphasis social egalitarians place on *relationships* raises a number of questions about the subject and scope of social equality. The subject of justice is often confined to major social institutions such as the constitution and the form of the economy—personal choice, social norms, and civil society are often seen to be excluded from the regulation of principles of justice. If social equality is about social relationships, surely even private, interpersonal relationships should be subject to norms of equality. (...) Many discussions of social equality are particularly concerned with the implications of equality on a political and an institutional level. The claim is that as citizens or, even merely as human beings, we should be treated as social equals, and the state and its institutions should not express, establish, or reinforce (certain kinds of) inegalitarian and hierarchical relationships between individuals or groups of individuals. (...) Is social equality one value that can be reflected on both a personal and an informal level, as well as on a political and formal level? What can we learn from social equality on an informal level that could apply formally, or vice versa? These questions about the subject of social equality also raise challenges about whether we may be justified to intervene in personal relationships—if we aim to achieve social equality, and if this form of social equality is reflected in or determined by personal relationships, then do we not have reason to try to establish equality in personal relationships? This can be seen to be a case of asking *which* relationships should be socially equal.” (Fourie 2015, 3-4)

¹⁵⁰ A similar concern is expressed by Schuppert 2015, 110: “If social equality is supposed to act as a social ideal that governs a wide array of relationships within a society, though, it seems that we also need a less intersubjective and less abstract account of what social equality entails. One way of providing such a less abstract account is to ask, which kind of relationships and structures actually threaten people’s status as social equals, that is, their status as fully recognized free and responsible

century masters and servants. In the previous paragraph, I stressed the *interactional* side of the question: deferential behaviors, expressions of scorn and disrespect, internalized self-deprecation, and cognitive barriers that reflect the internalization of inferiority (which is visible, for example, in the lower tendencies of low status groups to ask for better pay, as discussed above). In short, I have highlighted the behavioral apparatus that sustains status inequality between the master and the servant. However, social inequality embedded in the same relationship should be addressed from a different, but complementary point of view: one that takes into account the structural division of labor. Deferential behavior and expressions of scorn between ‘superiors’ and ‘inferiors’ cannot be abstracted from the organizational culture that places low-status groups – the poor, women, and black people – in the lowest ranks of the division of labor. “Domestic servants were essential to American middle-class life. They enabled middle-class women to devote themselves to social and religious concerns and men to business careers and political pursuits” (Muirhead 2004, 89). Deference and scorn mirrored a scale of worth among status groups, which ended up shaping the very way work was organized. Therefore the social inequality of domestic service should be addressed from the standpoint of relational equality, since it paradigmatically reflects essential differences in status, and a scale of worth between employers and employees. In Scheffler’s terms (2015a), full-time domestic service may be said to provide an example of a workplace environment where the interests of both parties do not count equally.

A relational egalitarian perspective would better account for the normative problems at stake than that proposed by Muirhead (2004). According to Muirhead, domestic service, such as that of the nineteenth century, is objectionable from the normative viewpoint of “fit” between one worker and her activity; on this model, one should feel that there is a “fit” between them in order for the requirements of justice to be fulfilled. However, the extreme variability of attitudes and individual dispositions concerning ideals of fit makes it hard to provide a generalizable assessment. The idea of social equality, by contrast, does not require that we enter into an investigation of the personal motivations of individuals.

To be sure, domestic service is far from being an issue pertaining only to the nineteenth century. Nowadays, personal service work has come to reflect broad inequalities between the North and South of the world: economic inequalities to be sure, but also status inequalities. Arlie Hochschild’s concept of “global chains of care” gives an idea of the hierarchical and highly segregated organization of carework throughout the world, where middle-class families from affluent countries externalize their carework to nannies coming from third world countries (Hochschild 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Fraser 2016a). Affluent homes of working couples outsource carework to caregivers who often come from abroad, leaving their own children to the care of others, thereby displacing the problem onwards (which is frequently referred to as “*the care drain*” phenomenon, see for instance Gheaus 2013). The concept of “stratified reproduction” effectively describes the intermeshing between social stratification and reproductive labor (Colen 1986). The *global outsourcing chain* of labor provides a contemporary example of how the division of labor reflects economic and status inequalities among social groups throughout the world¹⁵¹. The outsourcing logic that shapes the ladder of labor value is clearly visible in the case of dirty work, which is delegated to the

agents. In answering this question, we derive an idea of the basic parameters that a social egalitarian society wants to advance and which kinds of threats to agency social egalitarians should be concerned with.”

¹⁵¹ For a critical perspective on the care drain problem see Dumitru 2016.

lower ranked so as to perpetuate their low social prestige; such delegation is at the roots of prestige antagonisms¹⁵²:

The ranking has something to do with the relative cleanliness of functions performed. The nurses, as they successfully rise to professional standing, are delegating the more lowly of their traditional tasks to aids and maids. (...) And in the medical world there are two contrary trends operating simultaneously. As medical technology develops and changes, particular tasks are constantly down-graded; that is, they are delegated by the physician to the nurse. The nurse in turn passes them on to the maid. But occupations and people are being upgraded, within certain limits. The nurse moves up nearer the doctor in techniques and devotes more of her time to supervision of other workers. The practical nurse is getting more training, and is beginning to insist on the prerogatives which she believes should go with the tasks she performs. New workers come in at the bottom of the hierarchy to take over the tasks abandoned by those occupations which are ascending the mobility ladder. (Hughes 2017 [1958], 73)

I will reflect on the important problem of the intermeshing between social worth and the outsourcing chain in the next chapter. What is important to clarify here is that, as the servants' example shows, the same phenomenon can be fruitfully regarded from both the interactional and structural perspectives, linked by mutual solidarity. There is no reason to restrict our attention to the micro-behavioral side of the issue. Rather, by shedding light on the structural side of social inequality, we are better able to grasp the socially embedded reasons behind deference, and avoid offering purely psychological interactional expressions of social inequality. Moreover, we are able to provide a less abstract and more concrete account of what social inequality means.

A reading more attentive to social structures is thus necessary. Consider for instance the way the Industrial Revolution brought about an exacerbation of social inequalities:

The Industrial Revolution dramatically widened the gulf between employers and employees in manufacturing. Employers no longer did the same kind of work as employees, if they worked at all. Mental labor was separated from manual labor, which was radically deskilled. Ranks within the firm multiplied. Leading executives might not even work in the same building. This facilitated a severe degradation of working conditions. (Anderson 2017, 34)

The views of Iris Marion Young (1990; 2006), one of the authors that has most inspired relational egalitarianism, may be traced back precisely to this structural concern. According to Young, justice should be primarily conceived of in a *structural* sense. Rather than blame individual behaviors, as guilt-oriented approaches of justice do, we should point to structures, applying her notion of “structural injustice” to help us overcome the limitations of the interactional perspective (Young 2006; 2010). Nancy Fraser’s notion of status recognition is likewise one that rejects the psychologized approach, in order to point to institutionalized patterns of status inequality (Fraser 2003). Unfortunately, Young’s perspective, to which relational egalitarianism is undoubtedly indebted, seems to have been largely put aside by these same authors. Nonetheless, in her famous article “What is the Point of Equality?” (1999), Elizabeth Anderson addresses the issue of the division of labor in a passage that seems widely neglected by the – rather wide – literature on relational egalitarianism:

Negatively, egalitarians seek to abolish oppression—that is, forms of social relationship by which some people dominate, exploit, marginalize, demean, and inflict violence upon others. Diversities

¹⁵² Elizabeth Anderson recalls the seventeenth century concept of “great chain of being” where everyone had a fixed social rank, with creatures above and below one’s place (Anderson 2017, 10).

in socially ascribed identities, *distinct roles in the division of labor*, or differences in personal traits, whether these be neutral biological and psychological differences, valuable talents and virtues, or unfortunate disabilities and infirmities, *never justify the unequal social relations listed above.* (Anderson 1999, 313)

Drawing on Amartya Sen's theory of capabilities (which she refers to as "capability egalitarianism"), Anderson argues that the capabilities of functioning should go beyond political rights, so that they include participation "in the various activities of civil society more broadly, including participation in the economy" (Anderson 1999, 317). Some elements that point in the structural direction are thus already present in the relational egalitarian view.

What, then, are the normative conclusions that we may draw from this discussion? Working from both the interactional and structural perspectives, it may be established that relational egalitarian concerns for social equality relating to work require that:

- *contributive inequalities not be taken as status inequalities*, and that
- *status inequalities do not shape contributive patterns.*

In other words, *unequal divisions of labor that rely upon and create differences in social status should be reduced, and preference should be given to contributive patterns that do not reinforce or create unequal social status among workers.* The "status circle" should thus be broken. Contributive inequalities should not rely on, or translate into, status inequalities.

2.3. *Indirect Status Inequality: Social Equality and the "Inequalities of Another Kind"*

The distinction that I have proposed between interactional and structural status inequality may recall Scanlon's distinction between *direct* and *indirect* social inequalities. Direct social inequalities occur when some people are treated as if they were inferior, whereas indirect social inequalities occur in the presence of "institutional arrangements that, while they did not have the aim of expressing inferiority, nonetheless had the effect of giving rise to feelings of inferiority" (Scanlon 2000, 52, emphasis added). In other words, whereas direct status inequalities consist in *explicit inferiorizing treatment in one-to-one relationships*, indirect status inequalities consist in *institutional arrangements that implicitly express inferiority*. Carina Fourie defines direct social inequality as that which "directly and unambiguously confers better status to some in comparison to others" (Fourie 2012, 114), such as expressions of scorn or expectations of behavioral deference. She defines indirect social inequality as "an inequality of another kind (in other words, not a status inequality) but which indicates or leads to a social inequality" (Fourie 2012, 114), such as a social policy that marginalizes and humiliates a particular social group. In what follows, I will consider two kinds of indirect status inequalities: those conveyed by distributive arrangements, and those expressed by contributive patterns. More attention has been given to the former inequalities, but I argue that the latter deserve more consideration than they have so far received.

2.3.1. *Social Equality and Distribution*

Among the many "inequalities of another kind", most relational egalitarians have focused on distributive inequalities. The issue of deciding between competing distributive patterns according to whether they are compatible with social equality is a common way to address the

problem of indirect status inequality. The underlying assumption of these concerns is that the way resources are distributed produces effects on the way people are treated.

Relational egalitarians often address the question of which distributive patterns should be preferred from the perspective of social equality. For instance, Samuel Scheffler observes that the distributive pattern of “*laissez-faire* market system” critically discussed by Rawls (as the “system of natural liberty”) is undesirable from a perspective of social equality, because it distributes resources according to natural and social contingencies lacking any moral basis. Such distributive patterns necessarily entail that some persons fail to meet their interest to pursue their conceptions of the good, while allowing others to prosper “in ways that satisfy no comparably important interest” (Scheffler 2015a, 38). In Scanlon’s account, another form of distributive indirect status inequality can be found in large income gaps. Those who live at the bottom end of structures of large wealth and income inequality may be humiliated by them (Scanlon 2000, 52). However, it should be clear by now that redressing inequalities in material resources is not sufficient to improve people’s social standings. Even though they are deeply intertwined, wealth/income and status follow different, autonomous logics. Inherent to relational egalitarianism is an awareness of the limitations of the distributive perspective.

The distributive and the relational paradigms of justice clearly come apart on a number of issues. First, they rely on different ideas about the currency of justice: goods or social relations. Second, the normative questions they ask are quite different in that the distributive view asks which goods people should receive, whereas the relational view is interested in the quality of social relations. Their aims, third, are different: material fairness for the distributive paradigm, and social equality for the relational, thereby working within two different categories – class and status. Fourth, the hierarchies involved are rich/poor and superior/inferior – scales of wealth and income, and scales of prestige. Finally, individuals are represented in different ways: the distributive perspective tends to view them as “recipients”, whereas the relational perspective represents them primarily as “social beings”. More broadly, they are indicative of different anthropologies – of self-interested subjects, and of moral social agents respectively.

The table below outlines the key differences between the distributive and the relational approaches:

	Distributive Justice	Relational Justice
Subject	Material goods; resources; opportunities	Social relations
Question	What are people entitled to receive?	Are the ways in which people relate to each other just?
Aim	Economic justice; material fairness	Social equality
Social Division	Class	Status
Kind of Hierarchy	Scales of wealth; rich vs poor	Scales of prestige; superior vs inferior
Individuals	Recipients; self-interested subjects	Social beings; moral social agents
Injustice	Maldistribution	Direct unequal treatment and indirect expressions of inferiority

While clarifying some of the key differences, the table does not really account for the connections between them. How do we understand what may be called the “distributive-relational nexus” – that is, the way in which goods and social relations matter to each other?

The Distributive-Relational Nexus	
The way goods and social relations affect one another	
Question	How do people’s goods affect their status? How does status affect one’s access to goods?
Aim	Addressing how economic justice and relational equality mutually reinforce each other: which distributive patterns are preferable from the perspective of social equality?
Social Division	The intersections between class and status
Kind of Hierarchy	Hierarchies of wealth and income; hierarchies of status
Distributive-Relational Injustice	Stigmatized poverty; humiliating wealth differentials; etc.

I am freely reinterpreting here the intuitions of Nancy Fraser (2003). Whereas Fraser considers the distributive paradigm and the recognition paradigm of justice as co-essential and mutually irreducible, I am widening here the scope of recognition so as to include broader concerns for social relations. In this framework, distributive justice is sensitive to social equality, and vice versa. Note that this possibility is also defended by Elizabeth Anderson:

Certain patterns in the distribution of goods may be instrumental to securing such relationships, follow from them, or even be constitutive of them. But democratic egalitarians are fundamentally concerned with the relationships within which goods are distributed, *not only* with the distribution of goods themselves. This implies, third, that democratic equality is sensitive to the need to *integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution. Goods must be distributed according to principles and processes that express respect for all.* People must not be required to grovel or demean themselves before others as a condition of laying claim to their share of goods. The basis for people’s claims to distributed goods is that they are equals, not inferiors, to others. (Anderson 1999, 313, emphasis added)

The idea of a “distributive-relational nexus” is grounded in the view that there are issues that can be better addressed if the perspectives of distributive and relational justice are considered together, rather than in isolation. For example, if we consider how both perspectives represent individuals, the nexus may enable us to make a less definitive commitment to a view about what human beings ultimately are: we need not say that they are fully self-interested beings, nor merely moral social ones, but perhaps involve elements of both. Likewise, taking the perspective of the nexus gives us further tools at hand to assess distributive policies – for examples, are they too costly in terms of social equality to certain groups? Are they stigmatizing? The nexus allows us to address both the relational side of distribution, and the distributive side of social relations.

2.3.2. Social Equality and Contribution

Questions concerning how *distribution* should be arranged from a relational egalitarian perspective are relatively common in the literature, as is the comparison between the relational view and the distributive paradigm in general. But what about *contribution*? Far less considered are the ways in which contribution affects social equality. The way contribution is organized produces effects on the way people are treated and correspondingly, how people are socially positioned, which affects their role in the division of labor. Similar concerns about indirect status inequality should be extended to “inequalities of another kind” relating to work and the division of labor. This issue has been addressed by few relational egalitarians (Young 1990; Anderson 1999; Néron 2015). David Miller says that “if we want our society to be egalitarian, then we will try to shape our distributive practices so that the emergence of hierarchy is discouraged” (Miller 1998, 34). Replacing “distributive practices” with “*contributive practices*”, one may address contributive inequalities from a social and relational standpoint. Thus one may ask: *what contributive patterns are preferable from the perspective of social equality? Which forms of division of labor are compatible with the idea that no one should be treated as an inferior in social relations?* These look to be very important questions for both labor justice and relational egalitarian concerns. It is not surprising that sociologists consider the status of individuals as deriving primarily from their occupations (Kantzara 2016). I will attempt to provide some elements to respond to these questions in the next chapter. For now, I focus on some of the general traits and specificities of the relationship between the contributive and the relational perspective:

	Contributive Justice	Relational Justice
Subject	Contribution – work and the division of labor	Social relations
Question	Who does what?	What’s the quality of social relations?
Aim	Fair work	Social equality
Social Division	Division of labor	Status
Kind of Hierarchy	Contributive Inequality	Scales of status; superior vs inferior
Individuals	Workers	Social beings
Injustice	Miscontribution; contributive subordination	Direct/interactional unequal treatment and indirect/structural expressions of inferiority

Let us consider, now, their possible interconnections, which may be referred to as the “contributive-relational nexus” – the way work and the division of labor have effects on the quality of social relations, and vice-versa.

	<p>The Contributive-Relational Nexus</p> <p>The way the division of labor and the quality of social relations</p> <p>affect each other</p>
--	---

Question	How does a person's status affect their contribution in the division of labor? How does their contribution to the division of labor affect their status?
Aim	Addressing how contributive justice and relational equality mutually reinforce each other
Social Division	The intersection between status and the division of labor
Kind of Hierarchy	Occupational hierarchies and status hierarchies
Equality	Contributive-relational
Relational labor injustice	Status exploitation, discriminating hiring, a class/race/gender-biased division of labor/occupational segregation, invisibilization

Note that the contributive-relational nexus enables us to identify forms of injustice that a distributive perspective alone would not enable us to see. As I anticipated in Chapter II, *status exploitation* refers to the fundamental intersection between material exploitation and status inequality, which can be seen in the case of non-citizens being particularly exposed to exploitative occupations, as well as in the case of racialized work. *Discriminatory hiring* and the *status-biased division of labor* or occupational segregation can be understood as involving both contributive and relational forms of injustice because they embody a connection between one's social status and one's contributive role in the division of labor. The joint consideration of contribution and relational equality provides us with far richer tools to address indirect status inequalities, instead of considering status inequalities alone, or confining them to the interactional level. Moreover, they prove that the incorporation of sociological concerns into the normative perspective considerably widens the scope of justice. They appear as institutional and organizational crystallizations of inequality of status. Take the example of occupational segregation. Even though pay is a highly relevant side of the matter, in that status groups with different levels of pay often coincide with occupationally segregated groups, still providing low status groups with social equality would not merely mean paying them more, but allowing them to occupy certain positions in the labor of ladder value. This is an example of the contributive-relational-distributive nexus.

In fact, the tentative list of "relational labor injustices" just proposed may be seen as involving also a *distributive* dimension. After all, status exploitation does not merely refer to bad work conditions, but also to bad pay and uneven access to resources. Discriminatory hiring has consequences on one's material resources. Occupational segregation easily translates into status-based wage gaps. Therefore, anticipating here the discussion that I will develop in Chapter V, we may emphasize here that the following elements of the "nexus" may be considered *together, as relevant and mutually related dimensions of labor justice*:

	Distributive	Relational	Contributive
Labor Injustice	Material insecurity, wage injustice, exploitation, opportunity hoarding, economic marginalization	Misrecognition at work, stigmatization, status-biased hiring, occupational segregation	Qualitative and quantitative miscontribution/ contributive subordination

Each of these forms of labor injustice can be understood as inherently involving a plurality of mutually reinforcing dimensions. Note that I have not considered thus far the very important political dimension; insights there will lay the groundwork for the multidimensional conception of labor justice that I will develop in Chapter V. Integrating a relational perspective with contributive concerns leads to the conclusion that, to paraphrase Elizabeth Anderson, the division of labor should satisfy principles and include processes that show respect for all.

2.4. *Why Are Labor-Related Social Inequalities Objectionable?*

Social inequalities in the division of labor are objectionable because, by preventing certain people from contributing to social cooperation as peers, they indirectly treat them as inferiors.

Or, to put it differently, certain forms of division of labor *express* inferiorizing patterns of social inequality. I have argued that the relational egalitarian ideal of a “society as equals” should be extended so as to address the division of labor and the social system of cooperation. In addition to assessing *distributive patterns* from the standpoint of social equality, relational egalitarians should also assess *contributive patterns* from that perspective, because as sociological research teaches us, the way the division of labor is shaped is deeply connected to status inequalities. More precisely, drawing on Scanlon’s distinction between *direct* and *indirect* status inequalities, I have highlighted that contributive inequality constitutes a case of indirect status inequality of primary importance that requires further scrutiny. Status-biased division of labor is objectionable from the viewpoint of social equality because it prevents certain people from contributing to social cooperation as peers, through invisibilization, occupational segregation, exploitation, opportunity hoarding, and stigmatization.

I have so far not dwelled on the *reasons* for which social inequality is questionable. These reasons should not be taken for granted. Drawing on relational egalitarian insights, I have highlighted that we should be considered as social equals on the grounds of the postulate that all humans have equal moral worth and no justification of intrinsic scales of worth is tenable. Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, Elizabeth Anderson, and many others draw their normative considerations from a basic assumption of the equal moral worth of all. But does this suffice?

Many political theorists as well as sociologists and economists have addressed the hard question of why inequality can be objected to¹⁵³, but more attention has been paid to the question of the “currency of equality” (whether it should concern opportunities, income, relations, etc.), rather than the reasons for valuing it in the first place (Scanlon 2018). The literature on the topic has been growing in the last few decades.

2.4.1. *The Intrinsic Moral Worth of All: Deontic Egalitarianism*

According to Thomas Scanlon, inequality is objectionable because (a) it is often associated with deprivation and suffering, (b) it *creates stigmatizing differences in status*, and (c) it leads to

¹⁵³ On the distinction between *wrong* inequality and *bad* inequality, see O’Neill 2008; Parfit 2007.

unacceptable forms of power and domination (Scanlon 2000; 2018). Likewise, Rawls suggests that status inequalities “encourage those of lower status to be viewed both by themselves and by others as inferior”, and can lead to one part of society dominating over others, thereby creating deferential behavior and servility: “we may think it bad for people if they are servile or too deferential, *even if this does not frustrate their desires, or affect their experienced well-being*” (Rawls 2001, emphasis added). Therefore, Rawls too – drawing on Scanlon’s argument – believes that there are *inherent* reasons for which social inequality is objectionable. More precisely, this means that we can object to status inequalities *even if they do not entail any specific harms*. Close to the inherent reason, consider that inequalities based on status fundamentally conflict with our common nature as equal moral agents. This view is stressed by Samuel Scheffler (2015a) and Elizabeth Anderson: “all competent adults are equally moral agents: everyone equally has the power to develop and exercise moral responsibility, to cooperate with others according to principles of justice, to shape and fulfil a conception of their good” (Anderson 1999, 312).

For most of us, the idea of a scale of different levels of intrinsic worth among individuals is *prima facie* intuitively wrong. However, one should be aware that not *everyone* will subscribe to such a *prima facie* objection. It seems that the idea of equal moral worth holds power only for those who already accept it. What about the others? There are thus two complications here:

- What about those who are not convinced by the statement that all persons have equal moral worth?
- What can justify moving from the idea of *equal moral worth* to the idea of *social equality in the division of labor*?

Let us address these questions in turn.

2.4.2. *Inequality May Be Bad Because Of Its Undesired Consequences: Telic Egalitarianism*

For those who are not convinced, one should provide further reasons – i.e. *instrumental* rather than *intrinsic* reasons – for which status inequality can be objected to. That is, one should explain that social inequality is undesirable *because* it produces some other undesirable outcome (see Fourie 2012). This recalls Derek Parfit’s distinction between *telic* and *deontic egalitarianism* (Parfit 1997; O’Neill 2008). Those who defend the idea that social inequality is inherently wrong regardless of the bad outcomes it may entail are deontic egalitarians, whereas those who claim that social inequality is bad *insofar as* it leads to undesirable consequences are telic egalitarians (see Parfit 1997). Even though one may embrace the deontic view, still one should be able to provide evidence of the undesirable outcomes that inequality brings about. I considered above the deontic view. Let us consider now the reasons why social inequality may be instrumentally bad, looking in particular at social inequality relating to work.

Among the harms caused to individuals by social inequality, Thomas Nagel claims that it weakens the self-respect of the worst off, and erodes feelings of social trust and solidarity (Nagel 1974; Rawls 1999a, 386-391). Moreover, one’s ability to form a conception of the good may end up being compromised (Fourie 2012; Kernohan 1998). Among the harms caused to society, consider the well-documented idea that unequal societies tend to be less healthy than those that are more equal: deprivation, obesity and crime have been associated with inequality

(Wilkinson 1996; Marmot 2005; Marmot and Wilkinson 2006; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Fourie 2012; Marmot 2005). Martin O’Neill suggests that status inequalities can cause the same harmful situations for which we usually condemn distributive inequalities, such as objectionable inequalities in power and unhealthy social relations (O’Neill 2008, 121-123, 126-139). Carina Fourie (2012) interestingly highlights a widely neglected issue, namely the harms that social inequality can cause to the better off¹⁵⁴. Fabian Schuppert (2015) observes that the reasons for which distributive inequalities are objectionable can be extended also to social inequalities. Drawing on Martin O’Neill’s work (2008), on this view social inequality is objectionable because: it leads to domination (recall the convertibility mechanism); it undermines people’s self-respect; it leads to servile behavior; and it erodes social trust and solidarity (O’Neill 2008; Schuppert 2015).

Let us turn now to the second question. Merely stating that all persons are equally valuable as humans may be seen as providing a relatively weak basis for the view that no one should be treated as an inferior in the division of labor. What justifies this transition?

The way societies organize work fundamentally affects its distributive, social, cultural, psychological and political features (Godelier 1984; Weeks 2011; Deranty 2015). It is hard, thus, to see how a society could be fair with an unfair division of labor. Indeed, the idea that a worker’s status only affects them within the workplace is not plausible. The previous section has made it clear that one’s low-ranked position at work, tends to reflect also one’s low-ranked position outside of work. One’s position in the division of labor powerfully connects with one’s economic situation, social position, and political power. To be sure, this is also true for one’s class and status.

Occupational segregation is harmful because it “narrows life choices, education, and employment options, leads to unequal pay, further reinforces gender stereotypes, and limits access to certain jobs while also perpetuating unequal gender power relations in the public and private spheres” (*Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market* 2017, 1). And the same applies for class and race. “The segregated labour market restricts the career choices of women and men, and *affects the value (both in ideological and economic terms) attached to their contribution*” (EIGE 2017, 7, emphasis added). What Axel Honneth called differential achievement from the standpoint of identity and subjective psychology is now highlighted here as a feature of the system, where social inequalities are embedded in the way organizations work. Furthermore, Kohn and Schooler (1978; 1982) have provided evidence that low status jobs lacking self-direction and autonomy considerably affect the rest of individuals’ lives and even their personality traits (see Chapter II, the “whole life argument”). In sum, unequal work relations result in unequal and unfair access to options and participation in social cooperation as peers.

Social inequality, and particularly social inequality rooted in the division of labor, cannot be merely addressed by citizenship rights, as John Rawls believes (2001). One may benefit from equal citizenship rights and still suffer from contributive subordination (see Chapters I and II). Other authors have focused on how workplace democracy could contribute to reducing excessive social inequalities by making workers’ voices count for more in organizations (Dow

¹⁵⁴ Fourie makes a list: impaired moral capacity, in that being treated as a superior in conditions of extreme social stratification may foster cruelty and lack of empathy; cognitive distortion, where being treated as superior could lead to self-deception because it may be grounded on a distortion of reality and a false notion of the self; emotional costs, like stress and anxiety due to the pressure to meet unrealistic expectations (think for instance of traditional norms of masculinity, that prescribe to men attitudes of high self-control and strength); disaffiliation (Fourie 2012).

2003, 37). Following the wide literature on the topic, Fabian Schuppert, for instance, argues that “by democratizing hierarchical manager–worker relationships we can address domination in the workplace by making sure that any interfering decisions are legitimate and that workers’ relevant interests are not ignored” (Schuppert 2015, 122). However, note that workplace democracy has relatively limited scope with respect to the problems that I have highlighted so far. In fact, the complex ways in which status is embedded in organizations and institutionalized in common patterns of the division of labor clearly shows that it is not merely an issue of democracy. One could have voice in a particular company, and yet occupational segregation and opportunity hoarding may still persist – reflected by workers’ own beliefs and behaviors.

Overall, then, it may be argued that the reason why social inequality in the division of labor is objectionable is that *it prevents people from contributing to social cooperation as peers*. As equal members of society, all should be presumptively considered equal contributors to cooperation, in contrast to any form of status-biased division of labor. I will develop further this norm, which I call *contributive parity*, in Chapter V.

2.5. *Acceptable Inequalities: Esteem, Competence, and the “Good Hierarchies”*

So far, I have certainly *not* argued that hierarchies and inequalities are wrong “as such”. Indeed, we may well agree with Kant that inequality “is a rich source of much that is evil, but also of everything that is good”. As highlighted in the Introduction, the concept of contributive inequality certainly does not point to a world where task and role differentiation as well as specialization are abolished. Nor does the concept of contributive parity defend what Walzer would call a form of “simple equality”, where arithmetically equal contributive slots are expected from each citizen. Discerning between acceptable and unacceptable hierarchies should be considered as one of the tasks of relational egalitarianism (see for example Néron 2015; Schuppert 2015). I agree that “clearer thinking about hierarchy and equality is important in business, politics and public life. (...) To the extent that hierarchies are inevitable, it is important to create good ones and avoid those that are pernicious” (Angle et al. 2017; see also Dube 2013, 13 ff.). In this section, I attempt to contribute to clarifying this distinction of hierarchies. I have argued that contributive patterns grounded in people’s status are unacceptable, as is the low status accorded to some occupations. At least negatively, I have provided some general insights that may help us to discern between good and bad hierarchies. Rather than rejecting inequalities and hierarchies *en bloc*, what should be done is to identify the criteria that will enable us to discern between acceptable and unacceptable contributive inequalities. In Chapter V, I will provide further resources for this purpose.

Angle et al. (2017) have recently argued that eliminating all hierarchies would be undesirable “for we all benefit from the recognition that some people are more qualified than others to perform certain roles in society”. Not surprisingly, the example provided is that of surgeons, as it was also in Walzer’s case: “we prefer to be treated by senior surgeons not medical students, get financial advice from professionals not interns. Good and permissible hierarchies are everywhere around us” (Angle et al. 2017). To be sure, I do not argue against this, provided that differences between professionals and interns are contextualized – a person’s family origins, social class, their parents’ social status, country of origin and so on, are all factors that should be taken into account as strongly determining the chances that

individuals have of becoming professionals or interns. Likewise, if inequalities of esteem for excellence are not criticizable, provided that they do not turn into inequalities in respect, they should nonetheless be contextualized. Their role in a theory of justice is not to be prioritized, but subordinated to more urgent concerns of structurally embedded, and interactionally sustained, status inequality.

Praise for excellent work is part of what we have of good and, indeed, excellent work should be considered from the perspective of the benefits it provides to social cooperation. An excellent piece of music, an inspiring literary work, a scientific discovery or a brilliant pedagogy are all excellences that call for human admiration and “appraisal respect” (Darwall 1977). However they should not call for deference, unlike what Angle et al. (2017) argue. Rather, they might enable spontaneous forms of gratitude. The normatively relevant point here is that social inequalities based on esteem should not be misunderstood as social inequalities based on respect. Differential esteem becomes objectionable when it turns into differential respect (Fourie 2015; Runciman 1967) and exclusive rights of privilege (Schuppert 2015) – meaning exclusive right – even though there are cases where social esteem may itself entail disrespect from those who lack esteem (see Fourie 2015). Unlike esteem, respect cannot have degrees, it is not competitive, it is simply due to all. This reflects the old distinction between “recognition respect” and “appraisal respect” (Darwall 1977) (or “evaluative respect” (Hudson 1980)), as well as “simple recognition” and “recognition for this or that” (Walzer 1983)¹⁵⁵. As McBride emphasizes, “esteem recognition is necessarily unequal” (McBride 2009, 101).

This distinction between a baseline respect due to all and differential esteem due to some has been criticized by John Baker (2015; 1988). According to Baker, in this case we are left with “a distribution of respect that is quite typical of liberal egalitarianism: a floor of basic respect below which no one should fall and a system of fair inequality of esteem based on merit and regulated by a commitment to equal opportunities for attaining high esteem” (Baker 2015, 69). Indeed, restricting the perspective to equal opportunities for esteem, without seeing the relevance of status inequalities, is at risk of returning to us the shortcomings of Roemer’s perspective. Drawing from this line of reasoning, Baker defends a form of “*nearly* equal esteem”, to be distinguished from “strictly equal esteem” (Baker 2015, 69). Baker suggests that we distinguish between the person and the characteristics of the person that we praise on the grounds of accepted standards of evaluation. We should not draw holistic and broad conclusions about these persons: consider prominent historical figures, for example, of whose achievements are widely known and esteemed. “What often emerges on closer inspection”, Baker observes, “is that they had a similar mixture of virtues and vices to those of ordinary mortals” (Baker 2015, 72). Caution about making holistic judgements should come with an awareness of the considerable role played by luck in shaping people’s lives, to which one should respond with “modesty about people’s responsibility for their own accomplishments”, which should not be taken as a denial of individuals’ responsibility, but rather as the awareness that such responsibility covers “just a fragment of what they actually do” (Baker 2015, 72). Baker’s “radical” proposal also helps to relativize esteem with respect to the evaluative standards we use to appraise people. The dominant evaluative standards, Baker stresses, are “those set by the privileged” (Baker 2015, 72). This point has also been emphasized by Axel Honneth (1992;

¹⁵⁵ For a useful review of the conceptual nuances of the notion of respect, see Dillon 2018. For a broader, historically sensitive account, see Giorgini and Irrera 2017.

2010). It raises egalitarian concerns in that “their social position gives them and their families privileged access to the means for achieving success according to these standards” (Baker 2015, 72).

I find Baker’s caution understandable: while it is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate unequal esteem, it should nonetheless be normatively contextualized. According to a cautionary conception of esteem, it should not be holistic, it should take into account the role of luck in determining individuals’ accomplishments, and it should include a critical awareness of the fact that standards of evaluation tend to reflect current social rankings. Note for example that evaluative ideologies of work tend to reward certain personality traits over others – esteem is thus not a ‘free zone’, a neutral area impermeable to pre-existing inequalities. This is why evaluative esteem should be contextualized within broader frameworks of inequalities. Additionally, recall that status inequalities are not independent to inequalities of esteem. As highlighted above, the higher a person’s status, the higher their performance is likely to be positively evaluated “regardless of whether it is indeed qualitatively better” (Kantzara 2016, 3). As I emphasized earlier, status beliefs translate into higher or lower respect and assumed competence for socially valued tasks based on the category of social difference (Ridgeway 2016, 1). This certainly does not mean that esteem simply coincides with irreflexive status beliefs *tout court*, but nonetheless it provides another reason for caution and a focus on relativization. I would thus argue for a ‘cautionary model of esteem’.

While many of the points raised by Angle et al. (2017) in favor of hierarchy can be accepted – for example, that bureaucratic hierarchies may serve democracy – one of the least defensible seems to me the idea that some forms of deference are acceptable. The authors stress that “deference, when due, is good”:

Accepting that others know more or can do more than us communicates and enables an openness to learning and growth. It allows us to access what the philosopher Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee at the University of Hawai’i calls ‘the complex web of human relations in which the knowledge of the past is passed on from the elderly to the young’.

Deference expresses a recognition of one’s finite and fallible nature, communicates both to oneself and to others the centrality of relationality to one’s identity and wellbeing, contributes to fluid – and even graceful or beautiful – social functioning. (Angle et al. 2017)

But the reason why such “finite and fallible nature” should be the prerogative of the deferrer, and not of the deferred, is far from obvious. After all, even the best musicians, writers, film directors, scientists, managers remain finite and fallible to the extent that they are human. Finite and fallible human nature is not a trait reserved for some, from which others are exempted: it is shared by all. Thus, this observation provides an argument for the opposite conclusion to that derived by the authors: it is *precisely* on the ground of our shared finite and fallible nature that no one should have to show deference to others. Thus, perhaps it may be more appropriate to talk about a sort of feeling of gratitude and spontaneous praise that people may inspire for excellence, which is quite different to deference. Moreover, deference is at odds with what the authors themselves consider as power hierarchies to be intended as “*power with*” rather than “*power on*” someone, described as necessarily characterized by “reciprocity and mutual concern”. After all, it seems quite hard to grasp in what sense deference may be *reciprocal*, given that *by definition* it implies a hierarchy of worth. Rather than questionable forms of acceptable deference, then, one might accept inequalities in esteem and spontaneous

gratitude for excellence, provided that all people have the same actual chances to achieve them and that the outcomes are relativized through a ‘cautionary model of esteem’.

What has been shown in the sections above, is that status inequalities rooted in the division of labor involve a great deal of arbitrariness. The perspective of labor justice provides further arguments in favor of strategies that reduce labor-related status inequalities. This is not to say that all hierarchies should be eliminated because they are bad in themselves, or that inequality ‘as such’ is a bad thing. Rather, this is to say that social hierarchies should be subject to publicly scrutiny, and should not irreflexively turn into social inequality both in the interactional and structural sense.

3. The Relational Perspective on Labor Justice: An Overall Assessment

At this stage, the reasons why distributive justice is only partially equipped to address labor-related social inequalities should be clear. It is probably less clear, however, which advantages the relational egalitarian perspective offers to address labor justice in comparison with recognition theory. In this section I will briefly outline the methodological advantages that a relational egalitarian perspective may provide. I will then identify an implicit common element in the relational views discussed thus far and outline the key features of the *relational dimension of labor justice*. I will conclude by distinguishing between affirmative and transformative strategies of the relational dimension of labor justice.

3.1. The Specificity of the Relational Egalitarian Perspective on Labor Justice

Embracing a relational egalitarian perspective on work may considerably widen the scope of labor justice. First of all, a perspective attentive to social equality enables us to see forms of injustice that escape the distributive gaze. Whereas the concerns of social equality and distributive justice may overlap (see the “distributive-relational nexus” above), the discussion has shown that they point to quite distinct phenomena and normative logics. Phenomena like status exploitation, status-based occupational segregation, discriminatory hiring, as well as the very status-shape of roles and occupations, and the interactional apparatus that sustain them, are not well-addressed by the distributive perspective. Second, in addressing social hierarchies rooted in work structures, the relational perspective is suited to avoiding a solipsistic account of work, thereby meeting the social interdependence condition. It enables us to consider structures of work beyond individual psychologies. This perspective relativizes the positions and the roles of individuals in the division of labor, connecting them with those of others. What results is a representation of work as a fundamentally social phenomenon, where individuals and groups interact with one another in a way that is not merely horizontal. Third, it enables us to avoid the difficulties entailed by a perspective centered on identity, such as the risks of essentialism and subjectivism. Just like the idea of status-based recognition proposed by Fraser (2003), the idea of social equality may be a way to depsychologize normative concerns for social relations, widening the perspective so as to include social structures beyond individual psychologies and one-to-one interactions. It is not a view unanimously held by relational egalitarians, but I have proposed that a relational perspective of labor justice should consider together the structural and the interactional sides of labor-related social inequality. Fourth, relational egalitarianism may provide the resources to

introduce concerns of equality into an account of labor justice, which monist recognition theory as well as distributive authors did not make possible. Finally, in general, relational egalitarians tend to be more open to multidimensional concerns than monist recognition theory, but there is some variety between the positions here (Scheffler 2015a; Scanlon 2000; 2018; Anderson 1999; Wolff 2013)¹⁵⁶. If recognition theory is essentially interested in ensuring people’s positive identity development, relational egalitarianism is broadly concerned with ensuring social relations among equals. Their normative goals are respectively self-realization (recognition) and social equality (relational egalitarianism); they thus have two distinct subjects: identities and social status. The hierarchies involved are thus different – on recognition theory, there are scales of esteem, on relational egalitarianism, there are hierarchies of status. Therefore, they implicitly entail two distinct accounts of what labor injustice consists of: according to recognition theory, labor injustice may lie in *moral harms to one’s positive relation to the self*, whereas according to relational egalitarianism, labor injustice may consist in *inferiorizing social interactions and structures*. Relational egalitarianism’s ‘methodological virtues’ can be appreciated when contrasted with the distributive and the recognition perspectives. Since I have already addressed its relationship with distribution theories, in the following table I sum up the key differences between relational egalitarianism and monist recognition theory.

	Recognition Theory	Relational Egalitarianism
Question	How to ensure a positive relation to the self?	What’s the quality of social relations?
Aim	Self-realization	Social equality
Social Division/Subject	Identities	Social status
Kind of Hierarchy	Scales of esteem	Status inequalities
Labor Injustice	<u>Harms to one’s identity:</u> 1) alienation; 2) unequal social dignity and autonomy; 3) lack of opportunities for esteem; 4) social exclusion	<u>Social inequality:</u> Occupational segregation; status-biased hiring; stigmatization; misrecognition
Labor justice thesis (possible interpretation)	In order for workers to have a positive relation with the self, their contributions should be socially esteemed	Social interactions and the structures of work should be compatible with the ideal of social equality by treating all as equals, both directly and indirectly

To recapitulate, a relational egalitarian perspective on work: provides insights about the social relations of work rather than goods; shows how the roles in the division of labor are both horizontally and vertically intertwined and avoids providing a purely subjectivist account; offers a perspective more attentive to structures as well as interactions rather than individual psychologies; extends egalitarian concerns to labor structures; has possibilities of

¹⁵⁶ “The relational view does not deny that equality has a bearing on questions of distribution. Instead it holds that, in order to appreciate the bearing of equality on distribution, one must begin by understanding equality as a broader ideal that governs the relations among members of society more generally. Rather than assuming that justice requires the equal distribution of something and then asking what that something is, a relational approach asks what the broader ideal of equality implies about distributive questions.” (Scheffler 2015a, 23)

multidimensionality. However, besides these valuable resources, there are some limitations to the relational egalitarian account which may be identified in three aspects.

First, the consideration given to inequality – and correspondingly to equality – by relational egalitarians tends to be somewhat *static*. Inequalities tend to be presented as fixed realities, and hierarchies as more or less rigid scales. Young’s invitation to consider the processual, dynamic character of social relations in structures and institutions seems to be weakly present in recent works (Young 1990). Of course, the idea of status, too, tends to be weakly dynamic. From this perspective, Honneth’s account may seem preferable. His concept of recognition is inherently dynamic and agonistic – for in a sense, there can’t be recognition in the absence of a struggle for it. Recognition theory thus provides a more dynamic account of social reality and of normativity as well, which seems to reflect a deeper methodological difference. Recall that Honneth’s theory aims at being immanently justified, whereas relational egalitarians have a more ideal, analytical attitude. They have their roots respectively in Hegelian and Kantian traditions, with all the corollary of crucial differences between these traditions. However, in principle nothing prevents relational egalitarians from providing a more dynamic account of social equality. After all, this would be in the same spirit as Anderson’s recent writings on the historical roots of the idea (Anderson 2015; 2017).

A second feature is one that may be referred to as *indeterminacy*. What the idea of social equality immediately means is not always easy to translate into concrete terms. In other words, it seems that it is difficult to decouple the idea of social equality from its concrete forms without in some way losing its force. It is in its relationship with concrete structures and practices that social equality acquires clarity. However, this may not necessarily be a limitation. Rather, it may provide versatile tools to assess social arrangements.

Third, another difficulty is that relational egalitarians are not particularly concerned with “individuals’ differences”. They do not generally provide tools to address problems of unequal esteem, with some exceptions (Fourie 2015; Runciman 1967). Social equality, by definition, does not concern the unique difference of individuals, which is what esteem is essentially about. Nonetheless, it remains true that people wish to be recognized for their uniqueness. We do not find many resources that acknowledge people’s individuality in the relational egalitarian toolbox. In this respect, Honneth seems to be better equipped. To be sure, relational egalitarians do not argue that all are owed equal amounts of esteem, but that all should be treated as equals. Nonetheless, I have argued that shifting the perspective from individual behaviors to social structures may enable us to detect socially embedded impediments which restrict individuals’ chances of getting esteem. This perspective should have some kind of priority.

Finally, it is sometimes hard to specify in what sense the idea of social equality does not “merely” coincide with the idea of equal respect. However, the norm of contributive parity that I will eventually propose may be precisely understood as substantiating the idea of social equality with a greater emphasis on structural concerns (see Chapter V).

On the whole, an assessment of the benefits and costs of monist recognition theory and relational egalitarianism with respect to labor justice leads to the conclusion that, while monist recognition theory offers precious resources to help address the psycho-social complexity of work from a subjective perspective, its methodological costs are indeed higher when compared with those of relational egalitarianism. The relational egalitarian view may provide the ground for a normatively differentiated, egalitarian, socially sensitive, structurally

informed, and possibly multidimensional perspective on labor justice, whereas monist recognition theory suffers from low normative differentiation, a lack of egalitarian tools, from being poorly structurally informed, and from its untenable monism (see Chapter III).

It is with the pluralist strand of recognition theory that relational egalitarianism may perhaps be reconciled and, indeed, its virtues enhanced. Following this strategy, the virtues of relational egalitarianism may be put together under a unique model of justice that has most of the features required for labor justice: potentially multidimensional, egalitarian, socially interdependent, deontological, and pragmatically pluralist. However, these virtues can be such only if relational equality is considered jointly with other dimensions. In the following paragraphs, I will suggest a unitary framework that could reconcile the methodological virtues of relational egalitarianism with the pluralist strand of recognition theory. For now, let us further assess the premises of a relational dimension of labor justice.

3.2. *A Common Core? Egalitarian Recognition, Participatory Parity, and Status Equality*

A counterfactual idea of social equality can be drawn from both recognition theory and relational egalitarianism. In Honneth's theory, the counterfactual egalitarian element might be identified in the article of 1982 under the shape of what I have called *egalitarian recognition* (Chapter III). In Fraser's model, it is present in the idea of *status equality*, which consists in eliminating status impediments to participatory parity. In relational egalitarianism, it is developed more fundamentally in terms of *social equality*. Despite their different accents and their different theoretical frameworks, one may discern a sort of common normative core behind these concepts – namely a common concern for *equality*, and a common concern for the normative relevance of *social relations*.

Honneth's roughly conceptualized egalitarian recognition was meant to account for the unequal social dignity and respect suffered by the working class occupying the lowest rungs of the labor ladder. What workers wanted was equal social consideration as well as equal opportunities to be autonomous at work (the latter problem I will deal with in Chapter V). Their demands were expressed through everyday practices aimed at regaining spaces of autonomy and respect in the workplace. Fraser's participatory parity is inherently multidimensional – participatory parity occurs in the absence of both class and status (as well as voice) impediments. When someone is denied the basic status of being a peer, one cannot participate on an equal basis in social life. Relational egalitarians' idea of social equality broadly refers to being treated as equals and, negatively, to a rejection of hierarchies of social worth among people.

All of these concepts point, with different accents and emphasis, to a common concern for equality in social relations. The accents differ in that the primary interest of Honneth is *self-realization* and the healthy development of people's identities; Fraser's primary interest is rather peer *participation* in social life; and relational egalitarians' primary interest essentially points to the *quality of relations*.

	Equality in social relations	Normative goal
Axel Honneth	Egalitarian recognition	Self-realization
Nancy Fraser	Status of peers	Participatory parity

Relational Egalitarianism	Social equality	Quality of social relations
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There are some methodological impediments to the possibility of tracing these conceptions back to a common ideal, particularly with respect to Honneth’s view. In particular, Honneth’s concept of work as equal social dignity and autonomy in the workplace does not necessarily fit either Fraser’s or the relational egalitarian view. Many methodological differences divide their theoretical frameworks (see Part II, Introduction). A teleological, identity-centered, perfectionist approach does not seem to fit the deontological, status-centered and pluralist approaches of relational egalitarianism and the pluralist strand of recognition theory. Recall that in Chapter II I argued for the pragmatic pluralist condition, asserting that, despite its relevance, self-realization is not the best way to address normative problems of work. To be sure, Honneth’s roughly developed notion of egalitarian recognition met all the conditions for labor justice. However, being a relatively underdeveloped model soon replaced by the achievement principle, what it offers us is an intuition in need of further development.

There are thus more points in common between Fraser’s theory and relational egalitarianism than between either account and the monist view. Note that they both satisfy the conditions for labor justice (I’m leaving aside the *external justice* thesis here):

	Normative differentiation/ Multidimensionality	Social interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Deontological
Nancy Fraser	x	x	x	x
Relational Egalitarianism	Partially met	x	x	x

Let us now clarify in what sense the pluralist strand of recognition theory may expand the scope of relational egalitarianism, and vice versa. I have already pointed out (see Introduction to Part II) that critical theorists and relational egalitarians tend not to talk to each other. They engage in to two different “big debates” belonging to different traditions of political philosophy, which do not usually connect. However, I have also expressed the intuition that from their mutual dialogue we may be able to derive fruitful resources to address labor justice – a sort of mutual methodological advantage, that would lead us beyond the shortcomings of the perspectives addressed thus far. This possibility may be opened up by two essential features: the possibility of extending Fraser’s idea of status recognition to a relational egalitarian understanding of social equality; and the possibility of further developing the relational egalitarian faint openings to multidimensionality into a more articulated pluralist framework provided by Fraser’s model.

Status-based recognition. The relational egalitarian debate might contribute to the pluralist strand of critical theory by widening and enriching Nancy Fraser’s notion of status equality. Recall that the latter no longer reframed the problem of recognition in terms of identity (as in Honneth’s theory) but did so in terms of status because of the risks of identity essentialism and the impossibility of adjudicating between competing recognition claims (Fraser 2003). Thus, in order to depsychologize issues of recognition so as to make them subject to public

scrutiny and adjudication, a status-based notion of recognition replaces Honneth's identity-based one:

It is unjust that some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interactions simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics assigned to them. Let me explain. To view recognition as a matter of justice is to treat it as an issue of *social status*. This means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the *relative standing* of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as *peers*, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of *reciprocal recognition* and *status equality*. When, in contrast, institutionalized patterns of cultural value constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction, then we should speak of *misrecognition* and *status subordination*. (Fraser 2003, 29)

In the status model of recognition, injustice is not based, as in Honneth's, on "impaired subjectivity" or "psychical deformation", but rather on publicly verifiable *institutionalized* patterns of social devaluation, which constitute a violation of justice rather than an impediment to self-realization (Fraser 2003, 29). Fraser specifies that "on the status model, misrecognition is relayed not through deprecatory attitudes or free-standing discourses, but rather through social institutions. It arises, more precisely, when institutions structure interaction according to cultural norms that impede parity of participation" (Fraser 2003, 29). Note that this institutionalized understanding of status equality fits the consideration of structural status equality that I have argued later. However, unlike Fraser, I don't think that the interactional level should be ignored, given its key role as an everyday, relational and behavioral apparatus of broader structural social inequalities. Fraser's status-based notion of recognition may be considerably expanded and internally enriched through relational egalitarian tools, so as to have a broader concern for the quality of social relations *beyond* recognition. This may widen the scope of her views beyond concerns for recognition, and fit with her commitment to equality as well.

The concept of status or social equality may thus work as a joining bridge between the critical and analytical accounts of relational justice, and provides an alternative to the lack of egalitarian tools in Honneth's account. But this closeness should not be exaggerated. Indeed, Fraser does not merely express a concern for equality among persons. Her norm is of "participatory parity", which, quite clearly, is a bit more demanding than that of equality. Her stress is on participation, not on equality "as such": it is not merely that we are to be equal, but that we should be peers in participation. From this perspective, hers is an *enabling* norm of justice. Nonetheless, it should be noted that since the substantive element of Fraser's proposal lies in equality as participation, it is not philosophically far from the substantive element of relational egalitarianism lying more fundamentally in the "egalitarian ethos" (Wolff 1997). Fraser's framework could be usefully reconceptualized so as to connect concerns for recognition with concerns for relational equality, also incorporating multidimensional concerns. It could work as a joining link between two distinct traditions, also compensating for the sometimes too static and not explicitly multidimensional account of "social equality" provided by relational egalitarians through the enabling notion of participation.

Multidimensionality. On the other hand, the resources of pluralist critical theory might more consistently develop the already present relational egalitarian sensitivity to multidimensionality. I discussed earlier the common tendency of relational egalitarians to

provide relational arguments to assess competing distributive patterns (Scheffler 2015a). Fraser's pluralist model is more explicitly and plausibly multidimensional than relational egalitarianism, despite the fact that its integration of relational and distributive concerns (Anderson 1999) appears to be underdeveloped. Her status model "facilitates the integration of claims for recognition with claims for the redistribution of resources and wealth. (...) Recognition is assigned to the universally binding domain of deontological morality, as is distributive justice. With both categories thus inhabiting a single normative universe, they become commensurable – and potentially subsumable within a common framework" (Fraser 2003, 33). Rather than being an ethical question, recognition and status equality should be taken, deontologically, as a question of justice. Only in this way can it be reconciled with distributive concerns.

Therefore, rather than choosing between distributive and relational equality, one may consider them as co-essential as are Fraser's paradigms of justice – mutually intertwined and at the same time mutually irreducible. The idea of normative differentiation that I have defended thus fits Fraser's concern for multidimensionality, and Fraser's multidimensionality may incorporate, articulate and expand on relational egalitarian concerns. We thus don't have to choose between distribution and recognition, as the monist model requires, nor do we have to embrace a pluralist perspective, restricting the scope to the sole relational aspect of recognition – rather, we can consider distributive and relational justice as co-essential parts of a bipartite perspective, akin to that defended by Fraser. Status concerns are thus no longer restricted to recognition; they can be broadened so as to include broader concerns for the quality of social relations. Indeed, the scope of recognition was too limited to relational concerns. The discussion has shown that normative concerns are raised beyond specific issues of recognition. One may be esteemed or recognized and still suffer from structural contributive subordination.

Therefore, reinterpreting Fraser's model so that it provides a multidimensional framework for labor justice, and integrating it with the contributive dimension as I advocated in Chapter III (see also Chapter IV), one may discern the following dimensions of labor justice: *distributive*, *relational*, and *contributive*. The relational dimension will include broader concerns for the quality of social relations rather than being confined to recognition. Likewise, the contributive dimension should be integrated into the framework (see Chapter III). What Fraser considers to be a bidimensional perspective of justice, relational egalitarians conceptualize as indirect status inequality (Scanlon 2000; Fourie 2015). That is, relational egalitarians tend to consider other dimensions from the perspective of social equality, besides focussing on just participatory parity. Distributive patterns are assessed as being more or less compatible with the ideal of social equality; they are in a sense functionally dependent on social equality, and do not have necessarily independent force. Therefore, one should decide whether the broader norm should be of social equality or of participatory parity. The former treats equality as a matter of social relations, and the latter stresses the role of participation. The difference is subtle. I will not decide between these two solutions. Indeed, deciding which framework most helps to address labor issues, one's perspective cannot be confined to the status side of the question. The relational dimension of labor justice should be understood as one dimension among others, not as an overarching paradigm. In Chapter V I will argue that a norm of *contributive parity* may allow us to understand social equality in labor relations as one fundamental, but partial, strand of labor justice.

The mutual reframing of Fraser's and relational egalitarianism's framework is meant to provide a more suitable basis for labor justice. We have now a pragmatic pluralist, multidimensional, socially interdependent, deontological normative framework with which to address the problem. I will develop this in the next chapter, comparing this perspective to other, one-dimensional solutions. For now, it is sufficient to note that an egalitarian core may be applied to work as the fundamental intuition that labor relations and structures of work should show equal treatment to all, where this is also understood structurally. This may be referred to as the *relational dimension of labor justice*. If all should contribute to social cooperation as peers, this means not merely that they should be equally free from economic-distributive impediments to real free occupational choice (Chapters I and II), but also that they should be equally free from social relations that undermine their contributions to social cooperation as peers.

3.3. *Three Relational Aspects of Labor Justice: Esteem, Prestige, Status*

Chapters III and IV addressed various aspects of labor-related social relations, which can be summed up as follows:

- 1) *Performance-based esteem.*
- 2) *Occupational prestige.*
- 3) *Interactional and structural status inequalities.*

(1) Individuals' quests for social esteem for their differential contribution is emphasized by monist recognition theory, in the form of the achievement principle (*Leistungsprinzip*). Chapter III discussed the limitations of the achievement principle when it comes to labor justice, arguing for a more accurate distinction between esteem for one's contribution and occupational prestige – that is, between “achieved esteem” and “ascribed esteem”. I have not merely argued, as most theorists do (Walzer 1983), that normative concerns require that esteem be given in line with one's actual performances rather than in such a way that it is “undeserved”. I have also attempted to highlight the complex relationship between these two concepts, showing that low occupational prestige prevents some from gaining esteem despite their efforts, and that high occupational prestige facilitates others in getting achievement through comparatively lower contributive costs. In other words, the contributive costs that people have to pay also differ by virtue of the prestige attached to their occupations, regardless of their actual abilities. This framework considerably complicates Honneth's already ambivalent principle, and calls for more problematization, providing a highly questionable basis for labor justice. In particular, it suffers from the *structure-blindness* barrier. (3) Occupational prestige has proven to be an ascribed, corporative form of social worth based on pre-existing ideas about the differential value of the occupations. Occupational prestige is relatively independent from individuals' actual capacities because it represents a sort of crystallization of historically attributed social worth of clusters of activities. Closely related is the problem of (2) interactional and structural social inequality which I focused on in Chapter IV. In this chapter, it has been argued that we should not restrict the scope of normativity to the interactional side of social inequality, which addresses one-to-one behaviours. Rather, a structural perspective will enable to address social inequalities embedded in the way work is organized. Only a structural perspective on social inequality enables us to critically address phenomena like occupational segregation, status-based opportunity hoarding, and status

exploitation. Neither the achievement perspective, nor the interactional side alone may exclusively address the issue.

In the previous section I essentially argued that the way the division of labor is organized should neither reflect, nor reproduce, social inequalities. In this way I extended relational egalitarian concerns beyond common relational assessments on distribution, so as to include also contributive concerns. This may expand the field of application of relational egalitarian tools.

However, note that this response concerns only point (3). What should be our attitude with respect to performance-based esteem (1) and occupational prestige (2)? Concerning esteem (1), I have shown that, if taken alone, it provides few resources for labor justice, because it lacks a norm of equality and is not equipped to address structural forms of social inequalities. Its critical potential is weak, and thus it should be counter-balanced by a social egalitarian perspective. But this does not mean that social esteem should be dismissed as normatively irrelevant. Indeed, esteem for the excellence of one's work is part of what we have of good, and may be considered as a benefit to all in social cooperation, provided that it is relativized with caution and that it does not turn into differential respect or privilege (see above, §2.5). Making use of Baker's work (2015) I have relativized esteem with some cautions, drawing attention to the distinction between persons and their characteristics, the role of luck, the up-down nature of standards of evaluation (see §2.5; Baker 2015), and the status-bias in assessing competence. The idea of desert lies somewhat behind the idea of differential esteem. But "meritocratizing esteem" does not deal with all of the normative issues at stake here. Indeed, in our real world, performance-based esteem is already a value largely endorsed by society – i.e. as shown in the "culture of performance" – which does not make our society better, but provides a legitimating tool for existing social inequalities (see Honneth 2010), which translates into what Bowles and Gintis call "the reproduction of consciousness", readjusting people's aspiration and restricting their sense of the possible (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 125).

Thus it seems that theorists who focus all of their attention on the criteria for achievement – whether they are truly "earned" or "ascribed" – somewhat miss the point. The point is not whether one "truly deserves" esteem or not – at least this should not be the primary concern of labor justice – but rather how to ensure social equality. The relational problems of labor cannot be addressed without some norm of equality. The achievement principle is substantially lacking this tool. Thus, notwithstanding the ideas that differential esteem does not turn into differential respect, that actual opportunities for getting esteem are available for all regardless of occupational prestige, and that differential esteem is in any case relativized through the cautions outlined earlier, some norm of social equality should be introduced.

I developed this concern through a normative consideration of the findings of sociology of status and work and through the conceptual grids of relational egalitarianism. Before reflecting on this point, let me specify the conclusion to draw concerning occupational prestige (3). Note that occupational prestige overlaps with structural social inequality, precisely in the social perception of the worth of the occupations. In Chapter III, I emphasized two possible levels of normative consideration: one, affirmative, which simply stresses that esteem for one's capacities should be independent from occupational prestige (which may be read as the "meritocratization of esteem" strategy defended by most authors), the other, transformative, which claims that hierarchies of occupational prestige should be themselves subject to public

scrutiny and critical deconstruction. After all, both the lawyer and the cleaner perform tasks necessary to the reproduction of society, as well as to the well-being of its members.

From the discussion led so far, one may draw a typology of affirmative and transformative strategies to realize the relational dimension of labor justice:

Relational dimension of labor justice	Affirmative strategies	Transformative strategies
Performance-based esteem <i>(achieved esteem)</i>	Esteem for one's actual capacities regardless of status and prestige, without turning it into differential respect	Actually available opportunities to exercise one's capacities through the elimination of structural and interactional impediments to status equality
Occupational prestige <i>(ascribed esteem)</i>	Esteem regardless of one's occupational prestige	Esteem regardless of one's occupational prestige, plus deconstruction of current prestige hierarchies
Interactional and structural status inequality	Equal treatment for all <i>(interactional)</i>	Equal access to all occupations <i>(structural)</i>

Whereas most debates have turned around the question of whether esteem should be ascribed or achieved (Honneth 1996; Walzer 1983), I argue that our attention should turn instead to status inequality. In fact, it is status inequality that functions as a socially embedded impediment to social equality in labor, in a more fundamental way than social esteem. The status perspective has proven more equipped to address normatively relevant relational issues at work, beyond the limitations of an identity-centered view. The possibility of reformulating the relational dimension of labor justice from a status perspective implies leaving aside Honneth's approach. However, similarities between Nancy Fraser's model and relational egalitarianism may allow us to widen the scope of both the critical theory of recognition (its pluralist strand) and of relational egalitarianism. After all, both raise the issue of equality alongside concerns for the social dimension to be intended as irreducible to the economic dimension. They enable, thus, a multidimensional, egalitarian, and deontological perspective.

Therefore, social equality of status, especially its structural strand, has some priority, because it does not point to single individuals' behaviours, but aims at challenging socially embedded beliefs, norms and organizational cultures. The way work is organized should not be grounded in people's status, and people's role in the division of labor should not turn into status inequality. To give an example, this means that dirty work should not be reserved for the low-ranked social groups, and also that those who perform these tasks should not have a low social status because of their work. In Chapter V, I will draw further conclusions from these observations.

Before people can gain esteem for their contribution, we are to make sure that structural conditions for status equality are met. Let us see which possible remedies may be envisaged to this end. In what follows, I will focus my attention on interactional and structural status inequality as well as on occupational prestige.

3.4. *Affirmative and Transformative Remedies to Labor-Related Social Inequality*

Different remedies may be suggested to combat social inequalities embedded in work structures:

- *Elimination*;
- *Compensation*;
- *Affirmative recognition*¹⁵⁷;
- *Normative differentiation*¹⁵⁸.

The first response argues for the *elimination* of all status differences among occupations *tout court*. Historically, this position was defended by Gracchus Babeuf, who in his *Manifeste des Plébéiens* argued that the doctor and the waste collector should not be seen as having different social worth, and that the relative standing of their professions should be simply abolished (Babeuf 2017 [1795]). A similar view was defended by Edward Bellamy, put in terms of an “equalization of honor” (Bellamy 2003 [1888]). In Walzer’s terms, this view may be described as one of “simple equality”, because it simply argues for the arithmetic equalization of statuses.

The *compensation* response argues for the compensation of status inequalities by means of some other valuable goods, such as higher pay, additional free time, etc. This position may be associated with the distributive approach. It was defended by George B. Shaw, who argued that those who perform hard work should be compensated by an extra-dose of free time (Shaw 1913). Such compensation was not merely intended to address their contributive burdens, but also the lower doses of respect which hard workers suffer. Walzer by contrast believes that dirty workers should be compensated for their “esteem deficit” with higher pay (Walzer 1983).

The *affirmative recognition* response consists in providing a sort of “special esteem” for low ranked categories of workers, in order to redress the social injustice suffered by them in the lack of esteem they are given. Affirmative strategies on the positive identities of stigmatized occupational groups may follow. For instance, imagine a public campaign that encourages greater respect for cleaners. This may take the shape of a kind of celebration of the social worth of certain under-estimated occupations.

Finally, the *normative differentiation* response argues for the need to separate the sphere of contribution from that of status, so that one does not determine the other. Separating the division of labor from status inequalities has consequences on status itself, in that it will no longer be reproduced by the structures of work. This response may remind us of the pluralist model of Michael Walzer, according to which inequalities are acceptable when they do not convert into inappropriate spheres (1983). Note that this view leaves status inequalities untouched, taking them as a given – it merely asserts that they should not affect the division of labor. The boundaries, as it were, should be respected.

At various levels, normative differentiation, affirmative recognition, and compensation essentially leave untouched labor-related social inequalities. Normative differentiation draws “boundaries of competence” between the sphere of status and that of labor, without arguing that status should be abolished. Affirmative recognition counter-affirms the denied value of occupational groups. Compensation aims at lessening the effects of some of the undesired consequences of low status, providing tools to unburden people from them. Only elimination

¹⁵⁷ This notion of recognition is not one particularly defended by Axel Honneth.

¹⁵⁸ This list has been partially inspired by Joseph Heath’s lecture *Egalitarianism and Status Hierarchy*, held at the University of Tilburg on August 28th 2018, which I am freely readjusting and reinterpreting here.

argues for the abolition of all social inequalities. Let us thus distinguish between affirmative and transformative strategies.

Remedies to labor-related social inequality	Affirmative strategies	Transformative strategies
<i>Equality</i>	Compensation	Elimination
<i>Difference</i>	Affirmative recognition	Normative differentiation

Note that compensation equalizes benefits and burdens, and elimination equalizes the status of all. By contrast, affirmative recognition draws attention to the underestimated values of certain groups, and normative differentiation says that those who are socially unequal should not be so at work.

The position that I argued for is perhaps closest to the normative differentiation view, but each of these strategies has their virtues and limitations. Most of them – compensation, recognition, differentiation – with the exception of the elimination response, essentially accept status inequalities as *ineliminable*, and, more broadly, as indicative of a given, fixed and unchangeable reality. Perhaps, rather than merely arguing for a meritocratization of esteem, the best solution is to combine normative differentiation with a reduction of status inequality, appealing to mixed strategies according to the circumstances. This reflects the idea that while differential esteem may be inevitable, status inequalities are not. Note also that this entails a rejection of the idea that it is sufficient to discern between “earned” esteem and ascribed esteem. More has to be done at the level of structural status inequalities.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have expanded the scope of relational egalitarianism so as to include concerns for contributive inequality, moving beyond the limitations of both distributive justice and monist recognition theory. I have argued that relational egalitarianism may provide useful normative tools to address social inequalities embedded in the division of labor, extending concerns beyond common assessments of competing distributive patterns. Drawing on sociological research, I have addressed the relational aspects of the division of labor, distinguishing between interactional and structural status inequalities, which mutually reinforce one another operating respectively through one-to-one behaviors and the way that work is itself organized. –These inequalities result in phenomena like occupational segregation, the glass ceiling, and status exploitation. Status is a belief that turns into a norm circulating throughout society with the force of a “shared reality”, which ends up being crystallized in the way that organizations themselves are shaped. I have argued that normative priority should be given to structural status inequality, in contrast with the widespread belief that relational concerns should be restricted to social esteem or to one-to-one relations and micro-patterns of treatment. The pervasivity of status in the way work is shaped is visible in phenomena like status dilemmas and what I have called the status circle. Status dilemmas ground occupational segregation and invisibilization, whereas status circles perpetuate people’s position in the social hierarchy through work. In fact, a person’s social status tends to affect their “occupational fate”, and their role in the division of labor affects in turn their

social position. A sociologically informed relational egalitarian understanding of the status circle enables us to reject naturalistic conceptions of the division of labor as well as forms of status determinism, given the socio-historical nature and irreflexively determined status of norms, which has put them outside the realms of proper critical scrutiny.

The norm of social equality provides a critical standard with which to assess the relational aspects of unequal labor structures, providing more powerful tools to do so than monist recognition theory. This norm demands that social inequalities embedded in social structures be reduced, for they are undesirable for both inherent reasons of the equal moral worth of all people, and for instrumental reasons. Differential esteem provides limited critical resources to address these status inequalities, for it tends to justify existing inequalities and considers the relational dimension only from the perspective of the subject. Esteem should be relativized, and should not be transformed into differential respect or provide the basis for exclusive rights. If esteem provides insufficient resources to address the relational dimension of labor justice, the norm of social equality compensates here. The relational egalitarian toolbox may thus be expanded so as to adjudicate among competitive patterns of contribution. Ways to break the “status circle” may be found in a number of strategies, both affirmative and transformative: elimination, affirmative recognition, compensation and normative differentiation. Concerns of multidimensionality may be integrated, and methodological virtues mutually enhanced, by uniting the relational egalitarian perspective with Nancy Fraser’s pluralist model of justice. This may lay the groundwork for a multidimensional, egalitarian, deontological and socially sensitive approach to labor justice.

The relational dimension of labor justice essentially claims that the “status circle” should be broken. The tendency of status inequalities to convert into labor inequalities and vice versa should not collapse into social determinism. But social change requires time, effort, and includes costs. A politics oriented towards equality at work should show that the costs of maintaining socially unfair organizational structures are too high to bear.

PART III

Labor Justice:

Contributing to Social Cooperation as Peers

Once the distributive requirements for labor justice have been investigated along with its relational aspects, it is time to embrace an internal perspective on work. Part III pursues this aim in two steps. First, it considers the contemporary theories that address the problem of work and the division of labor from a normative standpoint, particularly: meaningful work theories, post-work views, contributive justice theory, and the democratic view. The discussion will enable us to distinguish two further dimensions of labor justice, besides the distributive and the relational dimensions considered thus far: the contributive, and the democratic dimension. Second, in this part a normative standard will be proposed with which to assess existing forms of work and the division of labor from the perspective of justice, which I call “contributive parity”. Rather than a fully-fledged theory of justice, contributive parity helps us decide between competing patterns of justice when it comes to work.

It will become clear, then, that multidimensionality is more than a mere juxtaposition of preexisting separate concerns. The fundamental intuition is that considering the distributive, relational, political and contributive dimensions together, the normative questions on work and the division of labor will themselves change. Thus, the distinctive contribution of this alternative perspective of labor justice to the debate may be anticipated as follows. Unlike meaningful work theories, it criticizes existing labor structures not because they do not fit people’s inherent interests in flourishing, but because they prevent them from contributing to social cooperation as peers. Unlike post-work views, contributive parity is not satisfied with merely demanding more leisure for all, for it contextualizes the demand to maximize time autonomy within the “social division of time”. Unlike contributive justice theory, it does not ground the claim for a fairer division of labor on the benevolent feelings of individuals, but rather on requirements of fairness due to all within a community of equals. It integrates the democratic view with distributive, relational, and contributive concerns, as equally relevant to labor justice.

This norm is supposed to reframe the normative debate on work in a multidimensional, egalitarian, pluralist, deontological shape, beyond the shortcomings of the existing debates identified thus far. Contributive parity points to an ideal of society where all contribute to social cooperation as peers, without obstacles of a distributive, social, contributive, or political nature. Indeed, labor injustice involves a number of dimensions: the economic-distributive dimension: *exploitation* (unfair transfer of energies); the relational-social dimension: *social inequality* (being status-biased at work); the democratic-political dimension: *powerlessness* (not being allowed to take part to decisions affecting one’s work); the contributive dimension: *miscontribution* and *contributive subordination* (being prevented from contributing as peers, in qualitative and quantitative terms). Even though these dimensions often go together – that is, if one is treated as inferior, this is because of the lack of economic means as well as powerlessness and misconception – they cannot be reduced to one another, for they point to discrete realities that raise distinct normative concerns.

This means that in a community of equals, it is imperative that no one be prevented from contributing as a peer because of economic obstacles restricting free occupational choice, social obstacles rooted in one’s social status, political obstacles that exclude people from meaningful

participation, and contributive obstacles that quantitatively and qualitatively impede workers from fairly participating in the division of labor as fully-fledged members of society.

Chapter V

Normative Models of Work

L'inégale répartition du travail de la sphère économique et l'inégale répartition du temps que libère l'innovation technique conduisent ainsi à ce que les uns puissent acheter un supplément de temps libre à d'autres et que ceux-ci en sont réduits à se mettre au service des premiers. Cette stratification-là de la société est différente de la stratification en classes.
(Gorz 2004, 22)

La sphère du travail n'est pas soumise à une seule "cité" de justice.
(F. Dubet 2013, 33)¹⁵⁹

In this chapter I will pursue two aims: first, I will discuss the most representative normative models of work in contemporary political philosophy, and second, I will develop further the multidimensional view of labor justice, whose premises I have elaborated in the previous chapters. Since the distributive and relational responses to normative issues of work have been addressed in the earlier chapters, I now turn to contributive and democratic responses. By “contributive” I refer to views that focus on the internal aspects of work – broadly speaking, the *qualitative* (the “what” and “how”) and *quantitative* (the “how much” and “when”) aspects of work. By “democratic” I refer to views that focus on democratic procedures, issues of power and decision-making in labor organizations.

Dimensions of Labor Justice			
<i>Economic-Distributive</i>	<i>Social-Relational</i>	<i>Political-Democratic</i>	<i>Contributive</i>

I will assess the democratic side of the issue mostly focusing on Iris Marion Young’s proposal, which I will refer to as the *democratic model* of work¹⁶⁰. Among the contributive models, I will address the *desirability models* and the *contributive justice* model. The difference between the latter will become clear: the desirability model addresses work from the perspective of the subjective experience of it, without or with weak consideration for the division of labor and concerns of equality; the contributive justice model, by contrast, addresses work as a problem of equality and directly problematizes the system of social interdependence of the division of labor.

Unlike the distributive views, these approaches take work as a primary, fully-fledged problem of justice. Thus, we are no longer worried by the concerned with the shortcomings of the *external justice* thesis: what can be found is here a fully internal commitment to improving working conditions for individuals, and to addressing the problem of work in its overall place in social life. I will discuss their strengths and weaknesses and then compare them with the standard that I propose based on the norm of *contributive parity*, according to which contributive inequality in the division of labor should be reduced when it prevents workers

¹⁵⁹ Despite this thesis is sympathetic with this statement, François Dubet’s reading of justice differs from that here proposed. The principles of justice concerning labor inequality he identifies are need, merit and autonomy (Dubet 2013).

¹⁶⁰ Note that the democratic model is particularly rich and discussed in the literature on workplace democracy (Cohen; Bowles and Gintis; Pateman) – however, I will focus my attention on Young’s proposal because her theory has been mostly considered for other contributions than that of labor justice – for example, the notion of political responsibility, the politics of difference, and her feminist theory. The contributive strand, by contrast, is comparatively far less developed.

from contributing to social cooperation as peers in economic, relational, political and contributive terms. Contributive parity is a norm already implicitly present in contemporary struggles for a fairer division of labor. It offers a guideline that helps us to adjudicate between competing normative claims on work, beyond merely allocative conceptions of equality, and provides a more precisely contributive interpretation of the norm of social equality as well. It thus offers tools to address pressing injustices in the way that work is organized, which are currently (at least in part) lacking in contemporary normative theories. In fact, it integrates the virtues of different perspectives of justice, without sharing with them the limitations of a one-dimensional approach.

1. Autonomy In and Outside of the Workplace: The Desirability Views

This section will address two allegedly opposite normative conceptions of work: theories of meaningful work, and post-work views. Unlike most of the theories considered, these views distinctively focus their attention on work. It is thus worth addressing them in order to identify their specificities, and to assess which resources they provide for a conception of labor justice. I will argue that, despite their claims to the opposite, meaningful work theories and post-work views tend to share the same normative register: they set the problem of work as a problem of the *good life*, thus placing it, once again, outside of the scope of justice. For this reason, I cast both of them as “desirability views”, in that the normative questions they address are not of labor justice, but rather of whether work is desirable in itself. These views also share another aspect: they address the problem of work on the grounds of the norm of *autonomy*, although with very different inflections. According to meaningful work theories, individuals’ inescapable claims to autonomy should be met in the workplace. The task of the theory from this perspective, thus, is to define a sort of baseline of autonomy and meaningfulness to be experienced in the subjective experience of work. According to post-work views, autonomy requires that individuals be allowed to choose not to work. This, of course, necessarily requires a deconstruction of the prevailing normative discourses around work. Therefore, they locate self-realization and autonomy in two distinct spheres: in the workplace, and in leisure respectively. Overall, they are thus chiefly interested in redesigning the normative requirements attached to work from a *subjective* perspective. In this section, I will call into question the elements shared by both of these traditions – namely *teleology*, *autonomy*, and *subjectivism* – highlighting their limitations for a satisfying conception of labor justice. However, the discussion will also enable us to appreciate how they can provide a moral lexicon that expands our normative understanding of work so as to include considerations about its qualitative and quantitative aspects. By reframing them in a deontological way, their insights may be usefully brought into a conception of labor justice.

1.1. Autonomy at Work: Theories of Meaningful Work

The concept of meaningful work was originally used in business ethics and organizational studies. But in recent decades a genuinely political-philosophical debate has been developing around the issue. Despite the many similarities among meaningful work approaches, each theory has its distinctiveness. I propose the following classification of the main contemporary views of meaningful work:

- Adina Schwartz' *self-determination model* emphasizes the value of autonomy as participation of the worker in shaping the goals of work, and in the exercise of initiative and intelligence as well. It requires democratization and the rotation of routine tasks against the division between task planners and task executors.
- Norman Bowie's *Kantian model* draws some requirements of meaningful work from Kantian theory, which offers an interpretation that draws a link between wage-earning and self-respect.
- The *moderately perfectionist liberal model* of Beate Roessler internally articulates the norm of autonomy in the workplace as "non-alienation" and "self-direction", along with concerns for economic autonomy.
- The *need approach* of Ruth Yeoman criticizes the liberal model, which conceives of meaningful work as a preference in the market, by reconceptualizing it as a fundamental human need.
- Andrea Veltman's *eudaimonistic approach* proposes a conception of meaningful work that emphasizes excellence and subjective happiness.

In what follows I will discuss these views, identifying some of their weaknesses and strengths. I will argue that, among them, the model of Adina Schwartz presents the most valuable resources for labor justice, because it satisfies the pragmatic pluralist condition, presenting at least indirect concerns for equality. However, I will argue that the overall way in which meaningful work theories 'set the problem' of work is too narrow, for it overlooks the relationships of interdependence in the division of labor, mostly focusing on the subjective experience of work, and is in some cases paternalistic. Thus, while on the one hand they may offer an internally rich conception of autonomy which no doubt cannot be overlooked, on the other hand their normative narrowness and ethical paternalism prevent them from addressing labor injustice in a fully satisfying way.

The theorist who first launched the concept of "meaningful work" in the political-philosophical debate is Adina Schwartz (1982). The targets of her criticism are the routine jobs that do not align with workers' goals; in her account, the archetype of "meaningless work" is Adam Smith's stultified worker in the pin manufacturing industry. On this view, what is objectionable are the impediments that workers experience to expressing and pursuing their goals, and thus essentially their lack of autonomy: «even the order in which they perform those operations, the pace at which they work, and the particular bodily movements they employ are largely determined by others' decisions» (Schwartz 1982, 634). This way, workers end up «blindly pursuing ends that others have chosen» (Schwartz 1982, 635). Schwartz highlights that the existence of meaningless, goal-blind, routine jobs is at odds with the widely recognized value of autonomy in contemporary societies. She defines autonomy as «planning effectively to achieve one's aims instead of simply reacting to the circumstances that face one», taking responsibility for decisions and choosing «actions to suit their goals» (635). This notion of autonomy does not refer to a mere "capacity" or potentiality to be autonomous; it points rather to the very "actuality" of autonomy. Note that, of course, as a matter of cognitive prerequisite, in order to shape one's goals one needs «intelligence and initiative» (635). Thus the idea itself of self-direction that underlies autonomy supposes the exercise of intellectual abilities to frame and pursue one's own ends (Schwartz 1982, 638). This definition of autonomy is clearly at odds with the characteristics of routine labor.

Most justifications of routine work claim that we should not ensure that individuals be autonomous in all spheres of life, for the low autonomy experienced in the workplace can be compensated for by higher levels of autonomy outside of work (Kymlicka 2002; Arneson 1987; see Chapter II). However, Schwartz stresses that no one would accept the same argumentation if it were used to advocate, for instance, a restriction of legal rights. The unacceptable premise of this view is that we can lead autonomous lives while performing un-autonomous jobs. Thus Schwartz responds through what I earlier referred to as “the whole life argument” (see Chapter II, §2.3) – here grounded on Adam Smith and Émile Durkheim’s intuitions, as well as on empirical investigations such as the widely cited study of Kohn and Schooler (1978; 1982), according to which workers who experience low levels of self-direction in the workplace are affected in their personality as a whole – that is, *even outside of the workplace*. What is normatively concerning here is the essentially hierarchical nature of the detailed division of labor, where workers are excluded from participating in decisions that affect their activity. What is objectionable, then, is not hierarchy as such, but more precisely the distinction between conceivers and executors reflecting different grades of autonomy in the workplace; the latter are expected to blindly follow instructions without room for expressing their intellectual capacities, and thus also their qualities as autonomous agents (for other criticisms of this distinction, see Murphy 1993; Young 1990; Gomberg 2007). According to Schwartz, task variety and proceduralist realizations of democracy are inadequate responses, because even making the job more various, there still would be little room for autonomy (for similar considerations, see Chapter I, §1), and because even if employees are allowed to vote on managers’ policies, «the relations between managers and detail workers are still hierarchical» due to managers’ higher control of relevant information that considerably affects the chances of their proposals being passed in a vote (Schwartz 1982, 641). Therefore, rather than focusing on task variety and democratic proceduralism, «jobs must be democratically redesigned, tasks must be shared out in a way that abolishes the distinction between those who decide and those who execute others’ decisions» (Schwartz 1982, 641), and information should be shared so as that all can «participate in shaping their enterprise’s policies» (Schwartz 1982, 642). To the objection that such an arrangement would entail owners’ loss of profits (once again, the *efficiency* objection), Schwartz responds that if all persons are to be respected as autonomous persons, then we cannot accept that some are «free to acquire wealth at the cost of others’ development as free agents» (Schwartz 1982, 642). That is, economic growth should not go at the expense of workers’ development as free agents.

Schwartz’ proposal is compelling, and this is so for two main reasons. First, it is not grounded on a strongly perfectionist view of work as self-realization, but provides *pluralistically acceptable reasons for autonomy* in the workplace, such as the exercise of initiative and intelligence as well as co-defining the terms of one’s activities. Second, the main focus on autonomy does not impede Schwartz from expressing an indirect concern for equality. In fact, the norm of autonomy enables her precisely to criticize the unequal division of labor between conceivers and executors, because executors are excluded from useful participation in goal-shaping. However, note that Schwartz’ view was proposed in the early 80s. Today, the framework of routine work has changed, for Taylorian categories have been replaced by a post-Fordist organization where work is more ‘parcelized’ (Gallino 2011). But this certainly does not mean that routine work has disappeared. Rather, this means that today’s “routine workers” include new categories of workers – for example, the “crowdworkers” considered in

Chapter II, significantly defined as “taskers” and their jobs as “taskified”, where no meaningful connection between them seems envisagable (Standing 2014; Irani 2015). Unfortunately her deontological, pluralistic, and indirectly egalitarian approach has not been retained by most of the accounts of meaningful work that have followed, which have interpreted the idea in a more ethically loaded and subjectivist way.

An example comes from Norman Bowie, who lays the groundwork for a Kantian theory of meaningful work (Bowie 1998). Even though Kant does not provide such a theory, some faint references to work are nonetheless present in his lectures prior to 1770. Bowie draws on some elements of Kant’s reflections which support the claim that work is required by the second formulation of the categorical imperative, according to which it is necessary to respect humanity as an end in itself. Drawing both on Kant’s faint references on the topic and his broader moral theory, Bowie argues that “a Kantian would endorse” the view that meaningful work should: be freely entered into; allow workers to exercise their autonomy and rational capacities; provide a sufficient wage for physical welfare; support their moral development; and not paternalistically interfere with workers’ views of happiness (Bowie 1998).

Bowie grounds self-respect on earned income. It draws on Kant’s affirmations that earning one’s bread through one’s work is necessary for self-respect. But grounding self-respect on earned income entails some considerable problems. This position is objectionable for at least three reasons. First, there might be a conflict between free choice of occupation (which is another of Bowie’s conditions for meaningful work) and wage-labor dependence. As the distributive-economic condition of labor justice highlights (Chapter I), one cannot freely choose one’s occupation without some form of material security – all should be equally free from need in order for free occupational choice to be substantive and not simply formal. Thus, Bowie’s two conditions are in conflict: that one should freely enter an occupation is not properly consistent with conditions of wage-labor dependence – equal freedom from material need is necessary for real free occupational choice. Second, the scope of self-respect is considerably wider than that of earned income, and making self-respect a consequence of earned income unacceptably discriminates against those who don’t earn their income through labor (for a number of reasons). The unemployed, the disabled, those who are not self-sufficient and in need of care, and those who perform housework outside of the official economy are examples of people that do not earn their income through labor and certainly should not be deprived of self-respect. The idea that an earned wage is a necessary condition for self-respect entails that certain people must blame themselves as less worthwhile than typical wage-earners. If it unacceptably excludes those who unwillingly lie outside of the labor market as well as welfare recipients from access to self-respect, Bowie’s position will not have assigned adequate weight to the fact that unemployment is a structural condition of all capitalist economies, and thus the dependence between work and income is not tenable. Self-respect should have to do with unconditional access to income, rather than with labor-mediated wage. Third, despite the asserted condition that meaningful work should not paternalistically interfere with workers’ conceptions of the good, this definition of meaningful work seems to be paternalistic in that it subordinates people’s self-respect to a precise conception of the good – on this account, earning money through one’s efforts is a necessary condition for respecting oneself. Those who embrace different views, like post-work theorists, will feel paternalistically interfered with. Finally, assessing these conditions from the perspective of social equality (see Chapter IV), one may argue that this account does not fit the requirement that a person’s place

in the division of labor not be transformed into social inequality: if wage-labor is a condition for self-respect, then the disabled, the unemployed, the not self-sufficient as well as those working outside of the official economy will end up being treated as inferiors. Bowie goes as far as to assert that “for a Kantian, the true contribution of capitalism would be that it provides jobs that help provide self-respect” (Bowie 1998, 1084). Wouldn’t self-respect be possible in a world where work were not the sole determiner of income? Arguably, answering this question negatively seems counter-intuitive.

On the whole, by stressing the wage side of the story, Bowie’s model exacerbates some of the shortcomings of the distributive view. However, wage-labor dependence was mitigated in Rawls’ account by redistributive solutions such as wide capital dispersal and some openings to workplace democracy, while it was explicitly rejected by UBI theorists through the unconditionality principle as well as by Roemer, who argued for people’s equal access to socially produced wealth. All of these distributive counterweights are missing here. All things considered, what can be drawn from Bowie’s account is a narrowly economic notion of meaningful work as wage-earning, with considerably paternalistic outcomes, and leading to questionable social inequality to the extent that it implicitly treats those who do not earn a wage through formally recognized work as inferiors. Rather than labor-mediated wage earning, what can generate self-respect and real free occupational choice is equal freedom from material need regardless of one’s occupation (see Part I).

From this perspective, Beate Roessler’s account (2012) looks more compelling. Roessler points out that, if people are forced to work in order to earn money necessary to live, then they cannot be said to be fully autonomous. She recalls that the liberal models of Kymlicka, Rawls, Gutmann and Thompson (1998) (except of Van Parijs) hold that people must work in order to earn their living, so as not to live off the work of others, while Honneth argues that people must work in order to get social recognition. Therefore, although they offer quite different reasons, these views fundamentally agree that people have some sort of *obligation to work*. There is, thus, «a theoretical self-contradiction» (80): on the one hand, these theories claim that subjects should pursue their conceptions of happiness under autonomous conditions, on the other hand, they claim that all people should work regardless of the actual content of work – i.e. «which in itself is ungratifying, heteronomous, or meaningless» (80). This self-contradiction lies in a normatively schizophrenic idea of autonomy which requires that all subjects freely pursue their conceptions of happiness while being forced to work. In this way they overlook the fact that work cannot be autonomous under conditions of economic need. Therefore, Beate Roessler supports the economic capital thesis defended in Chapter I. She clearly sees that under conditions of economic constraint, the liberal model fails to acknowledge that «we can have preferences for different forms of work, but we cannot have the preference not to work» (79)¹⁶¹. One cannot advocate the validity of the idea of autonomy in some cases and not in others – one cannot ask that people be autonomous and at the same time that they work regardless of the actual content of their work. «*If* people have to work, *then* meaningful work has to be available and its importance has to be adequately understood» (91):

¹⁶¹ “Autonomy is both used as an argument against the (roughly Marxian) idea that work should be counted as a special source of value, and against situations in which subjects are forced to work, irrespective of the question of their autonomy.” (Roessler 2012, 80)

People have to work because of the money. But note that it was precisely because of the liberal-democratic ideals of individual autonomy and value-pluralism that a normative theory of the value of work was criticized in the first place. If we now take into account the fact that people have to work because of the money they earn, the role of individual autonomy becomes precarious. Subjects have to work, whether they want to or not. With regard to the very question of why people work their autonomy does not seem to play a role. The necessity to work is a threat to autonomy which neither Honneth nor Kymlicka adequately addresses. (Roessler 2012, 76-77)

Therefore Roessler criticizes Will Kymlicka's liberal model and Axel Honneth's recognition model on the grounds that both «restrict themselves to the justice and equality of *working conditions*, and do not consider the *character of work* itself» (Roessler 2012, 73). Like Roessler, I argued earlier that the *external justice* thesis should be rejected and that a more internal perspective should be embraced. However, Roessler's idea of the internal character of work is focused only on the content of work itself, and does not necessarily extend to the division of labor. Moreover, while both Roessler and I criticize the liberal model because it supports the *external justice* thesis, we attribute quite different views to Honneth. Roessler's criticism is restricted to the specific assertions that Honneth makes in *The Fragmented World of the Social* (1995) that «the criteria of moral assessment cannot be related to the internal character of the work process itself, but rather only to the institutional framework in which it is necessarily embedded» (Honneth 1995, 247-60) – which he later revises. Thus, these views cannot be generalized as “Honneth's position”, given that he later asserts quite different things in favor of meaningful work¹⁶².

Roessler's second argument points to the «practical identity of the working subject» (81): the work we do has a meaning to us as subjects and contributes to shaping our own identities, which is not merely freely chosen, but requires some self-reflection. If the work we do has effects on our practical identity, since it takes up most of our time, and we cannot merely separate ourselves from that identity, then Kymlicka's claim that alienated work is compatible with autonomy becomes hard to defend. Roessler argues that a strongly perfectionist anthropological framework is not necessary – one may turn “alienated work” into “heteronomous work”, thereby making the same point «within a purely liberal framework» (81).

Thus Roessler points to the meaning of meaningful work in itself, as understood in the sense of “*autonomous*” or in the sense of “*non-alienated*”. In a quasi-Kantian shape, work can be meaningful in the sense of autonomous when you can take part in decisions that concern it, when you freely chose it, when you can use your specific capacities at work, and when «work is sufficiently complex, interesting, and demands a certain intelligence in carrying it out» (86). This idea of meaningful work as autonomy is thus very close to Schwartz' theory. Rather than embracing either strong perfectionism or simple liberal neutrality, Roessler opts for «a moderately perfectionist theory which maintains that there are various goods or human potentials to be realized, among them meaningful work» (76). Therefore, in some way Roessler's view satisfies the pragmatic pluralist condition because it seeks «to reconcile liberal pluralism with the value of meaningful work in society» (76). The liberal element in Roessler's account lies in the rejection of the idea that work is the only activity that «makes a human being human» (93). As for meaningful work as non-alienated activity, Roessler argues that

¹⁶² Later he indeed defends the idea of meaningful work in his model of work as social integration (Honneth 2010). Therefore it does not seem to me that a unique, definitive position can be discerned in Honneth's writing, because he has changed his view on the topic many times over 40 years (see Chapter III).

among the many notions of alienation in Marx, what is of interest for a liberal framework is not the idea that work is the only way through which individuals can realize themselves, because this is incompatible with value pluralism, but rather the idea of alienation from the product of one's labor as well as from the labor process. Consider Roessler's remarks that:

Meaningful or unalienated work can then be interpreted as making it possible for the worker to conceive of himself as having had a self-determined influence on the process of production as well as on the product itself. If that is the case, then the worker participates in the producing activity in such a way that he can see this activity and its product as not totally determined from the outside but as (some form of) expression of his own individuality, his own talents and abilities. (Roessler 2012, 88)

In some ways, this account of meaningful work mirrors Honneth's self-transformation model. These two strands of meaningful work – autonomy and non-alienation, roughly Kantian and Marxian respectively – go with another aspect, accounted for by the Aristotelian principle: the fact that some activities are considered as more desirable and gratifying than others. This is a matter of objective value, Roessler argues; it is not reducible to subjective views. Therefore, the implications for Roessler's view are that a standard of meaningful work should be set for any job in a just society, carrying «a minimum of self-determination, complexity, and skills» (92), as is the case with the minimum wage. Meaningless work should thus be subject to rotation, starting with public jobs – in this way, the state would no longer focus exclusively on salary or other extrinsic aspects, but pay attention to the very content of work.

Roessler's liberal and moderately perfectionist view consists thus in a sort of compromise between the perfectionist tradition that criticizes alienation, and the liberal perspective – like Schwartz' – which considers autonomy in a deontological way, in a quasi-Kantian shape. This compromise between the liberal and perfectionist strands has at the minimum the merit of raising the issue of work, while attempting to maintain a liberal framework. However, despite its admirable intentions this normatively hybrid model considers only the internal aspects only of the subjective experience of work, without seeing its connection with the division of labor.

Ruth Yeoman's approach (2014) takes another perspective. Even though she labels her account as "liberal perfectionist" like Roessler, she does not identify the weakness of the liberal position as a self-inconsistent conception of autonomy – rather, she reconceptualizes meaningful work as a fundamental human need, in order to not reduce it to a mere subjective preference in the market. Whereas I agree on the limitations of the *personal preference* thesis (see Chapter I), still I am not sure that the best way to reject it is to reconceptualize meaningful work as a fundamental human need. She claims that work should be meaningful as a matter of fundamental human need, because humans have fundamental interests in autonomy, freedom, and social recognition. More fundamentally, Yeoman argues that people need to *experience meaning* in their lives as a matter of universal motivation (Yeoman 2014, 6) supported by psychological, moral and political theory:

I argue that individuals who undertake non-meaningful work are less likely to be able to satisfy their need for meaning, and are thereby made unacceptably vulnerable to the harms of non-meaningful work. Remedying such harms demands a politics of meaningfulness, enabled by collective deliberation over the ways in which the interior content of work can be structured to alleviate unfreedom, heteronomy and misrecognition. (Yeoman 2014, 6)

Meaning is an internal good which should count besides external goods (e.g. salary). The aspects that Yeoman ascribes to meaning are rooted in the experience of autonomy, freedom, and dignity in the workplace. It is distinctive feature of meaning that it is co-created by individuals – meaning is not merely given: «to experience meaningfulness, we need to become valuers, able to recognize what has objective worth, and to affectively appropriate positive values to our lives» (11). In this way, becoming valuers is «incorporated into our practical identities, where we see ourselves as having the status as co-authorities». This is important to ensure human flourishing and self-realization. One should experience a sense of purpose in the workplace, in contrast with the pointlessness experienced by Adam Smith’s workers. Yeoman’s notion of meaningful work is thus existentially rich and normatively nuanced. Nonetheless, it expresses fewer concerns for liberalism than Roessler’s. It stresses that work is essential to human self-realization. And, as in all theories of meaningful work, concerns for freedom and self-realization do not extend to concerns for equality.

Even more demanding is Andrea Veltman’s eudaimonistic approach (2016). The normative questions Veltman addresses concern the role that meaningful work plays in happiness and the good life. Thus the philosophical perspective from which she considers the problem is that of flourishing, which designates «a sense of happiness in which an individual thrives on account of possessing a plurality of goods and exercising developed human capabilities» (Veltman 2016, 2). Veltman’s strategy is thus to reconceptualize work as a human good which is necessary to own in order to lead a flourishing life. Her concern is that philosophers do not include meaningful work in their list of the essential components of a flourishing life; this omission, she claims, is not defensible. Veltman thus warns the reader that the crucial role of work in human happiness should not be misunderstood as the idea that work is sufficient to make one’s life happy. Rather, she insists that people who overinvest in their jobs do not live a good life. She argues that:

The development of human capabilities (...) occurs only through *deliberate and sustained effort*, both on the part of an individual whose capabilities are developed and on the part of others who assist in her development. Since deliberate and sustained efforts directed at self- development or others’ development are forms of meaningful work, people cannot achieve flourishing without engaging in some amount of meaningful work, at least at some junctures in life. In this sense, meaningful work is necessary for human flourishing. (Veltman 2016, 16)

Veltman goes as far as to say that it is «doubtful that self-developed persons can maintain a state of flourishing without some form of work» (16). In Veltman’s account, working is thus even an ethical imperative – one cannot flourish without working.

Clearly, she seems not to have the suspicion that one may feel happy and lead a fully flourishing life even without work. There is a considerable dose of paternalism in this account, as becomes even clearer in the following passage:

If we imagine an independently wealthy person who prioritizes keeping his mind sharp and his character virtuous— filling his days with reading books, painting pictures, attending lectures or scientific exhibits, participating in stimulating discussions and charity events, or excelling at leisure activities— we see someone achieve a significant degree of flourishing without activities that qualify as work. *Yet, without work, even wealthy individuals of generous dispositions can lack a certain depth of character, an appreciation for the hard work that creates goods and services, and the satisfaction and esteem that issue from being useful in the world.* (Veltman 2016, 16, emphasis added)

Why should one have a “depth of character” in order to live a satisfying life? Why couldn’t one who appreciates leisure and who devotes her time to ‘non-deep’ activities be happy? Veltman tells us what we should feel, and prescribes that we should work hard in order to be satisfied. But this is unacceptably paternalistic: rather than helping us to figure out what we should do to ensure that no one suffers from labor injustice, it judges persons as less valuable than others if they do not meet her (questionable) standards of happiness.

Despite these highly questionable traits, Veltman claims that there are objective ways in which work is meaningful: it is not that work is meaningful «just in the event or in the way that an individual believes it is» (20). But this account seems to involve elements of arbitrariness that it is hard to fix through an asserted appeal to objectivity. She even draws the conclusion that meaningful work is not a matter of politics but rather of ethics, and the fact that not everyone can have access to meaningful work does not affect the ethical reasons to defend it. But this division of labor between “politics” and “ethics” tends to easily collapse into fatalism, as proved by Veltman’s own consideration of the availability of meaningful work as necessarily limited (2015). She argues that changes in the division of labor like task rotation will not eliminate inequality, and that anyway this is not a good reason to reject her eudaimonistic view of meaningful work (Veltman 2015; 2016). But the social interdependence condition requires that an account of labor justice should not be content with subjective concerns, for it should take equally into account the relative positions of others: in other words, we should not be satisfied, as Veltman is, with simply enlisting some positive traits for work to be meaningful, if we don’t simultaneously ask who will actually benefit from these advantages. Veltman’s disciplinary division of labor between ethics and politics easily translates into impotence.

Therefore, even though Veltman provides an internally articulated and nuanced account of meaningful work, it tends nonetheless to be too paternalistic, despite its claim that objective traits of meaningful work may be identified, and individualistic despite the claims that ethics and politics should be separated. Of course, Veltman’s theory of meaningful work is also grounded only on the norm of autonomy, with no concern of equality (2016).

1.2. *Meaningful Work: An Assessment*

From this critical outline, one can see that meaningful work approaches share some common traits. First, in one way or another, all of them ground their views on the norm of *autonomy*, however differently declined. Among these theories, we find sophisticated and diverse accounts of what being autonomous in the workplace means, as well as a rich typology of the nuances of autonomy at work. Second, with the exception of Adina Schwartz, all of them express one way or another *perfectionist* concerns. The variously nuanced perfectionist spectrum goes from the minimum of Beate Roessler’s «moderately perfectionist» liberal model (Roessler 2012) to the more demanding, excellence-oriented and eudaimonistic model proposed by Andrea Veltman (Veltman 2016). Such diverse degrees of perfectionism express differently ethically loaded commitments to the idea of meaningful work, self-realization, and happiness. Finally, all of them are fully committed to the *internal* aspects of work – and thus they can be said to embrace the *internal justice* thesis, which is lacking in most contemporary normative accounts.

In what follows, I sum up the key contributions of meaningful work theories, and then identify some of their general strengths and weaknesses. Among the weaknesses, I will distinguish: *autonomy without equality*, *one-dimensionality*, *paternalism*, and *subjectivism* (or moral solipsism). Meaningful work approaches share most of the weaknesses already identified in recognition theory (Chapter III). They also tend to represent structures of work as impervious to relationships of power. And, as some authors have stressed, they seem not to be sensitive to the ideological risks contained in the concept of meaningful work: one should discriminate between “meaningful work” and “the management of meaning” (Lips-Wiersma and Morris 2009). That is, in the absence of further normative tools, making work “meaningful” could be a way to encourage workers to accept their situations, through a form of “control of the emotional domain, in prescribing that employees need to smile and be happy” as well as prescribing to them “that they experience their work to be meaningful” (Lips-Wiersma and Morris 2009, 492). The critical scope of the model thus seems to be narrow when confronted with situations of domination.

Among the strengths, I will recognize the role of autonomy – thought of in a deontological framework – as a necessary but not sufficient condition of labor justice.

Theories of Meaningful Work	Model	What’s wrong at work?	What is meaningful work?	Most Valued Dimensions
Adina Schwartz	Self-determination model	The detailed division of labor where some plan and others execute, preventing workers from being autonomous	Participating in defining the goals of the company; sharing of routine tasks; sharing of relevant information	Democratic, contributive
Norman Bowie	Kantian liberal model	Being forced into an occupation; being prevented from being autonomous and developing one’s rational capacities; not receiving a wage sufficient for physical welfare; being prevented from one’s moral development and receiving paternalist interference in one’s conception of happiness	Free entry into work; allowing workers to exercise their autonomy; allowing workers to develop their rational capacities; providing a sufficient wage for physical welfare; supporting workers’ moral development; not being paternalistic about workers’ conceptions of happiness	Mostly distributive
Beate Roessler	Moderately perfectionist liberal model	Not taking part in the determination of at least some parts of one’s activities; not being able to express one’s specific capacities	Autonomous and non-alienated work	Mostly contributive
Ruth Yeoman	Need approach within a	Heteronomy, alienation, misrecognition, and lack of purpose	Being co-creators of meanings and performing autonomous, free, and dignified work	Contributive

	perfectionist liberal model			
Andrea Veltman	Eudaimonistic approach	Lack of flourishing	Developing one's potential by exercising one's capacities; supporting virtues like dignity, pride, self-respect; providing a purpose; integrating elements of a worker's life	Contributive, relational

Autonomy without equality. First, meaningful work theorists all agree in one way or another that autonomy is a key norm for work to fit standards of ethical acceptability. But they don't sufficiently take into account that one can be autonomous while at the same time suffer from labor injustice. There is one case that shows this with particular clarity: freelance workers are autonomous; they set their schedule, modulate their goals, exercise intelligence and initiative in the workplace but this does not mean that they are invulnerable to exploitation. Quite on the contrary, recent research has shown that some categories of freelance workers are particularly exposed to exploitation. Their alleged autonomy does not prevent them from benefiting from low social protection and extra working-time overload. Freelance workers have been referred to as "the fifth state", an underestimated category of white-collar workers suffering from particularly exploitative work conditions (Ciccarelli 2011).

Likewise, phenomena like occupational segregation are compatible with individual autonomy in the workplace. After all, if a company contains 90% low-ranked occupations, which nonetheless are quite autonomous, and which are occupied by people from low status groups, to argue that they should be autonomous seems to miss the point of what is objectionable here – which has first and foremost to do with equality. Also, one may ask: if the work were no longer routine, would justice be realized? Consider, for instance, the workers who perform fully-fledged meaningful tasks, and yet are exploited. One cannot derive justice only from the qualitative character of the tasks. Adina Schwartz' self-determination model at least partially escapes this criticism, because it compensates for an exclusive interest in autonomy with a criticism of the unequal division of labor between conceivers and executors, thereby proposing routine task rotation as well as substantive democratization of the workplace.

Paternalism. Second, most of these models tend to ground their theories on ethically loaded and thus highly questionable views on the ethical role of work in people's life. Thus they don't meet the pragmatic pluralism condition, except for Adina Schwartz' approach. Unlike Andrea Veltman, Schwartz does not tell workers what they should feel in order to be happy, and does not prescribe recipes for flourishing grounded on an inherently questionable assessment. Rather, she grounds her idea of meaningful work on the objective conditions of participation in goal-making and the exercise of initiative, which do not contain elements of paternalism.

One-dimensionality. Third, all of these approaches tend to be either one-dimensional or partially multidimensional. To be sure, the dimension they value most is the *contributive*, because they focus all of their attention on the internal aspects of work. However, these internal concerns do not extend to the division of labor (except for in Adina Schwartz' view) nor to the quantitative aspects of labor time. Note that there is also attention paid to the *distributive* aspects in Bowie (wages sufficient for physical welfare for self-respect) and Roessler

(the connection between economic autonomy and autonomous choice of the occupation): Bowie reflects on wage as a condition of self-respect, whereas Roessler emphasizes economic constraints as undermining people's labor autonomy. I argued earlier against the former, and in favor of the latter. Also, a more precisely *democratic* concern can be found in Schwartz, while the relevance of esteem and recognition (for the *relational* dimension) is stressed by Veltman, although not in terms of social equality but rather in terms of achievement (see Chapter III). If Schwartz takes into account the *contributive* and the *democratic* dimensions of labor justice, Beate Roessler's view importantly highlights the role of material resources in occupational choice (see Chapter I), thereby integrating a *distributive* concern into her *contributive* account. Meaningful work views lack the shortcomings of the distributive view, particularly with respect to the *external justice* thesis. Nonetheless, as Beate Roessler does, they should integrate concerns for economic justice in order to substantiate their claims about autonomy. I have already included this point in the economic dimension of labor justice (Chapp. I and II). Even in these cases, the various dimensions involved in work are not considered jointly, as one comprehensive, internally articulated concern.

Subjectivism (or moral solipsism). Finally, with the exception, again, of Adina Schwartz, all of these views tend to restrict their attention to work as a subjective experience, without seeing the vertical and horizontal connections with others in the division of labor. This considerably restricts the scope of their views, in that what we can say with the tools at our disposal is only that a certain threshold of variously defined meaningfulness should be reached for the individual, but how such meaningfulness is supposed to affect the division of labor is not specified. Without concerns for social interdependence, one is at risk of conveying a view of "meaningful work for the few".

Therefore, with the partial exception of Schwartz' approach, it can be concluded that most meaningful work views share most of the limitations of Axel Honneth's view. None of them have concerns for equality, and most tend to ethically overload labor as a special source of meaning, which is incompatible with alternative interpretations. With the exception of Adina Schwartz, none of the meaningful work authors consider that people may legitimately reject work as the core of self-realization. They are not fully and simultaneously concerned with the distributive, relational and democratic dimensions, and tend to neglect the quantitative side of labor justice (note that Veltman defends, however, the reduction of working time). Additionally, without contextualizing individuals' demands for meaning and autonomy into the broader division of labor, they provide a morally solipsistic account that easily collapses into a view of "meaningful work for the few". It thereby implicitly reproduces contributive inequality.

By addressing work in paternalistic and solipsistic terms, these approaches implicitly contribute to the liberal dismissal of labor justice, because they indirectly confirm the (false) antithesis between value pluralism and normative concerns for work, as I argued in Chapter II, §2. This antithesis can be rejected if we consider work from the perspective of *justice* rather than the *good*. But this reframing of the problem is not enabled by most meaningful work theories, which set the issue in terms of the human good.

Therefore, among the meaningful work theories, Schwartz' approach seems to be the most compelling. In her account, meaningful work is first and foremost work which is self-directed

Meaningful work theories	Normative differentiation/ Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Deontological Perspective	Internal view
Self-Determination (Adina Schwartz)	Partially met (contributive + democratic)	Partially met	x	x	x
Kantian (Norman Bowie)	/	/	/	/	x
Liberal Moderately Perfectionist (Beate Roessler)	Partially met (contributive + distributive)	/	/	Partially met	x
Need (Ruth Yeoman)	/	/	/	/	x
Eudaimonistic (Andrea Veltman)	/	/	/	/	x

not in a metaphysical or paternalistic sense, but in the sense of actually democratizing the goals of the activity and sharing routine work. This model is not grounded on an ethically loaded view of happiness or on paternalistic behavioral prescriptions. Furthermore, the focus on individual autonomy does not prevent Schwartz from seeing the roots of heteronomy in labor inequality: in this case, in the unequal division of labor between task planners and task executors.

What can be retained from meaningful work views is an *internal concern for the quality of work*, particularly concerning the aspects of *autonomy*, *initiative* and *complexity*. Note that I don't take "complexity" to consist in "intellectual labor" in contrast to manual labor; rather, I take complexity as negatively consisting of *non-routine* labor.

In this way, the theorists help us to considerably expand the contributive dimension of labor justice with respect to the qualitative character of work. These concepts should be considered as objective features rather than subjective demands. Therefore, they should be reframed in deontological terms. A deontological rather than teleological idea of meaningful work enables us to avoid paternalistic and arbitrary interferences on individuals' behaviors, while providing a normative threshold that potentially allows us to critically address questionable forms of work.

1.3. *Freedom Outside of Work: The Post-Work Ethic*

Post-work views can be considered as the symmetrical inverse of meaningful work approaches. If meaningful work perspectives see work as an essential means for self-realization, post-work views shift the core of self-realization outside of work, towards leisure.

Nonetheless, I propose to refer to both of them as “desirability views” because in both cases the normative questions they address do not concern labor justice, but rather the desirability of work.

A society free from work is a classical topic: according to Jules Lafargue (2010 [1883]), we should demand a right to laziness, possibly sustained by the full automation of work; likewise, Bertrand Russell imagined a society where could all be lazy thanks to automation (2004 [1935]), and Keynes did the same (2010 [1933]); according to Arthur C. Clarke, we should aim at “a world of full *un*employment”. Criticisms of the “dogma of work” (Lafargue 2010 [1883], 8) along with the old dream of a society liberated from work seem to have returned to prominence in recent debates on UBI and automation (see Chapter II, §3.3). One of the political theorists who offers the most articulated defense of this longstanding ideal is Kathi Weeks (2011). In this section I address her view.

Weeks’ “political theory of work” consists of an “ethics of the refusal of work” aiming at deconstructing the widely shared assumption that work is the center of human self-realization and dignity. Weeks considers this widespread view to be ideologically overloaded. She emphasizes that the rhetoric of “vocation” and of work as “calling” disguises the far less romantic reality of exploitation. In her view, the centrality of work in our lives “is one of the most stubbornly naturalized and apparently self-evident elements” of our time. “Productivism” is also dominant in the critical views she endorses, such as feminist theory and Marxism. The work ethic is thus an ideological tool aimed at providing an ethical rationale to exploitation:

As an individualizing discourse, the work ethic serves the timehonored ideological function of rationalizing exploitation and legitimating inequality. That all work is good work, that all work is equally desirable and inherently useful is, as William Morris once noted, “a convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others” (1999, 128). The Protestant ethic also “legalized the exploitation of this specific willingness to work,” Weber observes, insofar as it “interpreted the employer’s business activity as a calling” (1958, 178).

Note here the deep distance from Bowie’s conception and, in general, from meaningful work views. Far from providing self-respect, the wage relation fundamentally remains a relation of subordination:

Although the wage relation has come to be considered the hallmark of self-sovereignty, it nonetheless remains a relation of subordination, and the autonomy that work is expected to ensure maintains an uneasy relationship to the ongoing subjection that it also authorizes. (Weeks 2011)

“Once we enter the workplace”, Weeks observes, “we inevitably find ourselves enmeshed in the direct and personal relations of rulers and ruled”, for it is at work that “we often experience the most immediate, unambiguous, and tangible relations of power”.

Thus, from these few words the distance from meaningful work approaches becomes clear. Even though Weeks does not address them, it is clear that she thinks that views like these demand too much to work: they expect “an epistemological reward in the deliverance of certainty”, “a socioeconomic reward” in terms of “the possibility of social mobility”, as well as “an ontological reward in the promise of meaning and self-actualization”. The problem is that all of these promises attached to work necessarily end up being unkept. They are detached from reality: as Weeks emphasizes, the ethical discourse of work is “ever more abstracted from the realities of many jobs”. Post-work views like that of Kathi Weeks are thus characterized by a disenchanting gaze. They advocate an ethics of the refusal of work which is aimed first

and foremost to its re-politicization, from a perspective that one may describe as holistic. For Weeks the problem is not to improve degraded working conditions, but to question the very role of work in our lives. If for meaningful work views the problem of work in its routinization, lack of meaning and heteronomy, on this view the problem is the very role of work in our lives and its global legitimacy.

From the perspective of the refusal of work, the problem with work cannot be reduced to the extraction of surplus value or the degradation of skill, but extends to the ways that work dominates our lives. The struggle against work is a matter of securing not only better work, but also the time and money necessary to have a life outside work. (Weeks 2011)

Weeks grounds her critical perspective on the value of *freedom*, to be interpreted not in the individualized sense of non-interference, but in the political sense of “collective freedom”. On this view, freedom is “a relational practice”, not “a zero-sum game in which the more one has, the less another can enjoy”. Political freedom, as opposed to solipsistic interpretations of freedom, is a “world-building practice”, as Weeks says with an apt expression. According to Weeks, theorists have neglected work not only as a “practice productive of hierarchies” but also as “an arena in which to develop and pursue a freedom-centered politics”.

Weeks’ resources for anti-work politics and “post-work political imaginaries” are taken from Max Weber, Jean Baudrillard, feminist social reproduction theory (Federici 2012; Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa 1999) and the post-operaist Italian tradition (Negri, Virno, Hardt). They ultimately converge into an ethical “deflation” of work aimed at reducing the ideological emphasis of the supposed centrality of work for individuals that dominates the normative discourse. Moreover, as Weeks stresses, the current conditions of the labor market that make work uncertain and selective also in terms of the possibilities of self-realization, support this view.

Note that at a theoretical level, the ethics of the refusal of work does not consist in a “renunciation of labor *tout court*”. It rather supports “a refusal of the ideology of work as highest calling and moral duty, a refusal of work as the necessary center of social life and means of access to the rights and claims of citizenship, and a refusal of the necessity of capitalist control of production”. Thus, it is not merely a matter of refusing exploitation, but more globally of refusing work as an overall “principle of reality and rationality” (Weeks 2011; Baudrillard 1975, 141). At a concrete level, the ethic of the refusal of work translates into a demand for universal basic income and working time reduction – broadly speaking, what is demanded is a general “reduction of work” both in terms of time and its social importance, as well as “a replacement of capitalist forms of organization by new forms of cooperation”. Whereas UBI can serve to “open a critical perspective on the wage system” and “to provoke visions of a life not so dependent on the system’s present terms and conditions” as well, a reduction in working time (resulting in a working week of thirty hours) is supposed to provide “more time to imagine, experiment with, and participate in the relationships of intimacy and sociality that we choose”. Weeks’ critique is thus a “holistic” one: in her perspective, rethinking work is rethinking the whole system of social relationships around our lives. Unfortunately, the “new forms of cooperation” remain merely gestured at in her account, and are not developed further.

Weeks’ ethic thus supports a *distributive* (UBI) and *contributive* (in a quantitative sense, meaning working time reduction) response to labor justice, which certainly has its merits. If most views endorse an ethically loaded defense of the normative interest of work as a key to

self-realization, Weeks' approach provides resources to "de-romanticize" the philosophical discourse on work in a way that seems to be more compatible with pragmatic pluralism. Importantly, she addresses the importance of unconditional access to income as a fundamental requirement for work freedom. She points to the reduction of working time as a key political demand – which was not present in meaningful work theories. These important aspects are to be retained in a conception of labor justice.

Nonetheless, note that although they approach the debate from opposite sides, meaningful work theories and post-work views fundamentally share the basic premise that the normative problem of work is an ethical one in the first place. In fact, even if Weeks' is a "counter-ethic", still she grounds too normative view on work in a conception of the good. In fact she questions the "mode of life" sustained by the work ethic. As she says, the refusal of work looks like "a potential mode of life that challenges the mode of life now defined by and subordinated to work". From this perspective, the ethic of the refusal of work may be contextualized within the broader struggle of competing conceptions of the good, where no one seems to have the last word.

Therefore, it is clear that the dispute concerns competing conceptions of the good attached to work, not labor justice in the first place. Both meaningful work and post-work views tend to share this normative framework – that is, the way in which the problem itself is set – proposing competing interpretations of the role of work in the good life and its place in human existence. The underlying normative register and the main framework are essentially the same. Both defend a *teleological perspective* that restricts the normative issues of work to the question of whether and how it is desirable. In this way, however, they are not concerned with making acceptable for all the conditions that they claim are good. In fact, in the case of the refusal of work, how are we to prevent this ethic from being the privilege of the few?

The task of answering this question is not accomplished by the post-work view, which is interested only in deconstructing current normative discourses on work. However, in this way it avoids addressing the fundamental questions of contributive inequality and, particularly in this case, of leisure inequality: *who will be able to afford to refuse work and enjoy leisure?* Would the refusal of work be available to all? How do we ensure that all can refuse work without outsourcing their work obligations to other, less advantaged people? If we don't provide answers to these questions, it is very likely that those who can refuse work and enjoy leisure as the post-work view prescribes will be the most advantaged. I will reflect on the problem of the *social division of leisure* in the following paragraphs. For now, let me emphasize that *in order to be fully consistent with its ideal of political freedom, the post-work view needs to address the question of whether the ethic of the refusal of work can be embraced by all.*

Without addressing this question we are at risk of conveying an ethic of the "refusal of work for the few". Even if this goal is not to be understood literally as a direct refusal to work, but rather as a more broad political strategy, still even in a symbolic form one should address the question of who, in a post-work world, will take charge of the socially necessary work, and whether "liberated time" would be equally available to all. Otherwise, the ideal of political freedom would coincide with that of solipsistic freedom, which Weeks rejects. Recall that this raises a key problem of justice in that the better off can outsource undesired tasks to the low-ranked and thereby enjoy leisure. Leisure is not a norm free zone: some enjoy more, and others enjoy less, in a way that appears inherently related to the division of labor. Therstein Veblen brilliantly accounted for leisure inequality almost a century ago (1899). I will refer to this

phenomenon as the *social division of time*. In order to embrace it, an ethic of the refusal of work should prove compatible with the possibility for all to embrace the same ethic.

However, if meaningful work theories have considerably expanded the normative toolbox at our disposal with respect to what it means to be autonomous in the workplace, in a way that partially enables us to criticize unequal division of labor, the post-work approach expands our normative toolbox in another way: as a sort of “normative antidote” that reduces the ethical inflation of work, relativizing the place of work within a broader constellation of plural goods. It provides some premises to rethink “the relation between life and work” beyond current discourses.

Although such ethical reduction of work provides useful tools for pragmatic pluralism, nonetheless it remains an ethic among others within a broader dispute over the value of work. Thus, even if it may function as an antidote against romanticized, unrealistic accounts of work which disguise exploitation and oppression, still it provides a partial account of work as the realm of absolute heteronomy. What about those who – legitimately – feel a special attachment to their work, and see it as a means to self-realization? What about those who *legitimately* choose to invest most of their psychic and social resources to labor? Can’t one see work as a means of self-realization? As someone observed, “work is not that bad after all” (see Anderson 2017). Indeed, to these people, the post-work perspective may even sound too paternalistic. They cannot possibly be represented within a post-work framework. Therefore, whereas the ethical reduction of work may serve the purpose of pragmatic pluralism thanks to the ethical reduction of the normative overload of work, there is nonetheless a latent paternalism lying behind this view.

Post-Work Ethics	Normative differentiation/ Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Deontological	Internal view
Kathi Weeks	Partially met	/	Partially met	/	/

Once again, thus, a more comprehensive view is needed.

Before turning to the problem of labor time and then to the egalitarian views of labor justice, let us recapitulate the steps taken so far. The desirability views address the problem of work in terms of the question of whether it is desirable or not, rather than in terms of labor justice. Both of them ground their normative views on work on the norm of autonomy, although provide different interpretations of it. While they are often presented as opposite accounts, they share the fundamental way in which they set the problem of work: in terms of a conception of the good and the role of work in people’s lives. Meaningful work theories tend to see work as the core of self-realization, whereas post-work views reduce and relativize the role of work in self-realization. Finally, they tend to confine their attention to the subjective experience of work, neglecting the interconnections and hierarchies of labor – thereby potentially leading to exclusivist conceptions of meaningful work or selective access to the refusal of work. Despite these shortcomings, they provide valuable resources to rethink the contributive dimension of labor justice. Meaningful work theories provide elements of autonomy, initiative, and meaning as necessary to the quality of work. Post-work views provide elements relating to the quantitative dimension of work – i.e. the reduction of labor

time. Even though alone they cannot provide a fully satisfying conception of labor justice, they offer some valuable elements to take in that direction.

2. Work and the Social Division of Time

The great promise of technology, indeed, has always been to liberate us from the constraint time of necessary work; however, it has been shown that this is an illusion, for the more technology, the less time we have (Schwartz Cohen 1986; Rosa 2010). Post-work views have the merit of drawing attention to the normative significance of free time. Even though this is a widely absent issue in debates on justice, people *do* have normative expectations about time. And it is not without significance that such expectations are fundamentally connected to work.

So far I have addressed the *qualitative* side of the contributive dimension of labor justice. But there is another side to be taken into account, no less important than the former: the issue of time – the quantitative side of the contributive dimension. Indeed, note that this is only an analytical distinction, because the quantitative and the qualitative sides of contribution are intertwined. For example, overwork cannot be merely considered as a quantitative issue, for it considerably affects the quality of one’s work – common stories of “burn out” and “workaholism” narratives speak to this clearly. Nonetheless, I maintain this distinction because, even if they are deeply related to one another, they point to distinctive sides of the question.

In this section, I discuss the normative importance of time for concerns of labor justice. I show that post-work views and distributive accounts of justice can give only a partial account of the problem. A labor justice perspective may be better equipped to this purpose.

2.1. *The Normativity of Time Struggles*

Historically, in a variety of social struggles, time has been a crucial issue of justice, a sort of political battlefield. It is not without significance that the first workers’ struggles concerned issues of working time, such as the struggles for the shortening of the working day under the Industrial Revolution. The Taylorist division of labor was first and foremost a matter of rationalizing *working time* (2007 [1911]): maximizing production primarily meant producing more in less time – that was the goal of the “scientific division of labor”. The definition itself of “productivity” is inherently temporal, since the goal is for more production in a shorter amount of time. Consider the historical struggles for workers’ paid holidays as a matter of right. Importantly, article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that “everyone has a right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay”. Recently, a “right to disconnection” was legally recognized in France: workers have no obligation to answer work emails and phone calls outside of their scheduled working time. While I am writing, in the United Kingdom a public debate is stirring on the possibility of shortening the working week to 4 days. By analogy with Michel De Certeau’s lexicon (1980), these forms of public normative discourse around what may be called “time justice” could be referred to as *time strategies*¹⁶³. Time strategies are collective negotiations over social time conventions and norms.

¹⁶³ De Certeau did not specifically talk about time, but broadly about strategies of resistance and social change (De Certeau 1980).

Time negotiations however do not occur only on a collective basis. Time struggles can be found also in the subjective experience of work. Consider that workers tend to renegotiate their free time also during working hours: sociological studies have shown that workers attempt to take free time from work through a series of micro-strategies aimed at regaining time autonomy in the workplace (see Chapter III). Thus, besides collective struggles for a fairer social time, subtle practices of time renegotiation occur, implicitly conveying demands that call for alternative models of time as opposed to the prevailing instrumental model of time. Many sociologists have shown that workers within the workplace tend to engage in actions that express a need to break from constraining rhythms of heteronomous working time. A rich vocabulary has been developed to describe these implicit forms of opposition to time heteronomy in the workplace: «*EigenSinn*», «*désengagement*», and «*coulisses du travail*», among others. They take the shape of playing with smartphones, dreaming while pretending to work, smoking in toilets for extended periods of time, and other tactics in this vein (Lüdke 1996; Renahy 2015). Although sociologists haven't explicitly addressed these practices as specifically relating to time, these examples may be read also as forms of normative time renegotiation, implicitly pointing to alternative temporal rationalities. That is, people in their everyday lives engage in more or less implicit time struggles in order to maximize their control over time and reduce the impact of heteronomous time in their lives. These *time tactics* – again, by analogy with De Certeau's lexicon – are individual attempts led on a daily basis to reaffirm, so to speak, one's sovereignty over time (*Zeitsouveranität*).

This normativity emerging from micro- and macro- time struggles, which I have called “time strategies” and “time tactics”, cannot be overlooked within an account of labor justice. If justice has to do with the elimination of impediments to peer contribution, unfair inequalities in the enjoyment of time autonomy should be deemed an important matter of justice. There are distinct normative concerns that relate to when and how much we work, and when and how much we can enjoy free time – that is, “time for what we want” (Rose 2016). This becomes even clearer if time justice is considered through the lens of contributive inequality.

2.2. *Free Time For Whom?*

As a scarce resource, time gives rise to social inequalities. In particular, time inequalities are deeply intermeshed with contributive inequalities. Consider that benefiting from “paid holidays” is a sign of a good work position; the contributively disadvantaged do not benefit, by definition, from holidays, and even less from *paid* holidays. Paid holidays are reserved for the better off in the contributive hierarchy. Among the worst off, the precarious, gig workers, and particularly the “on call workers”, represent typical examples of time heteronomy. “On call workers”, in particular, have to be available for work any time during the day, and if they reject the call they risk losing their jobs; paid holidays, a clear schedule, and the possibility of planning ahead in the long and short term are dreams for these workers. Richard Sennett (1999) brilliantly described the specific kind of time related suffering experienced by precarious workers. With the widespread deregulation of labor in Europe from the 90s, and with the vertiginous increase of short-term contracts, workers are especially exposed to the experience of time expropriation: they cannot plan their lives in the long-term; they are forced to start from “zero” at every contract, continuously having to prove their value to employers as if they have no story behind (Sennett 1999).

But this crucial divide between people benefiting from time autonomy and people suffering from time heteronomy cannot be abstracted from overall contributive inequality:

(...) It is well documented that compulsory time is more prevalent in the case of manual workers. Those who must “punch” a time-card at the beginning and end of each working day, or who have to comply with rigid timetables, do not enjoy much autonomy in their daily schedules; and shift workers enjoy even less. (...) One of the main social inequalities with respect to time is the amount of autonomy a person has in organizing his or her own time. (64)

As Julie Rose recalls, “it is those with less education and lower earnings who disproportionately perform evening and night work, with lower-wage workers more likely to work evenings and nights even among managerial and clerical workers alone” (Rose 2016, 11). Time autonomy and free time are thus highly stratified along the lines of labor inequalities.

Note that this time inequality is status- and class-biased. Consider the longstanding problem of the “work-life balance”. Part-time working hours are typically considered as a solution to manage the time conflicts raised by the care problem, and in case parents (women in most cases) cannot shorten their working hours, they are forced to outsource care – to externalize, so to speak, their reproductive labor time to others (see Hochschild 1997; 2012a; Ehrenreich and Hoschild 2003). But part-time work is not universally available. It is no surprise, then, that there is a higher percentage of women than men who are unemployed in the formal economy. The overburden of care responsibilities on women due to the gendered division of labor, the “second shift” of the massive entry of women in the labor market, and the difficulty of reconciling such responsibilities with a work schedule lie behind the gendered time crisis (Bryson 2007).

Likewise, time availability and time cultures are associated with social classes and their *habitus*. For instance, it has been shown that “less educated people watch more television, are more likely to spread out their activities, and generally tend to lessen the density of their use of time.” (Pronovost 1989, 64) Being socialized not to “waste” one’s time is typically associated with middle and upper class culture; arguably, this interiorized attitude of time rationality turns into a key resource when it comes to competition for valuable positions: those who have learned to use their time “wisely”, acknowledging it as an economic scarce resource to invest rationally, certainly have more tools at their disposal to succeed in the race for the most desired jobs. Time inequalities rooted in class inequalities thus indirectly turn into contributive inequalities.

As for the status side of time, one should mention Thorstein Veblen’s classical book *The Leisure Class* (1899). Leisure as a positional good exhibited by the upper classes, however, is no longer representative of current status-related time practices. Recent empirical research has replaced the idea of upper-class idleness by showing that indeed today it is rather the lack of time that counts as a positional good for the better off (Bellezza et al. 2017). Time shortage has become a status issue: it is precisely the upper and middle classes, the highly ranked in the division of labor, that typically exhibit their *lack of time*, thereby benefiting from status returns. Time is thus not only a key source of normative negotiations, it is also at the crossroads of a number of inequalities.

Note that it is in its relationship with work that the normative relevance of time emerges with particular clarity. Trivially, without the constrained time of work, one would not need to demand free time. People attempt to reduce their working hours and strive to reconcile

their working time with their “time of life”. Indeed, the very definition of “free time” contains an implicit reference to labor – it is “free” precisely in contrast with another time which is “unfree”. One can hardly talk about free time without making even an implicit reference to work. Arguing for a greater share of free time is equivalent to arguing for a shorter share of working time. However, one may follow Michael Walzer who aptly says:

Free time is not only ‘vacant’ time; it is also time at one’s command. That lovely phrase ‘one’s own sweet time’ doesn’t always mean that one has nothing to do, but rather that there is nothing that one has to do. We might say, then, that the opposite of leisure isn’t work simply but necessary work, work under the constraint of nature or the market or, most important, the foreman or the boss. So there is a leisurely way of working (at one’s own pace), and there are forms of work compatible with a life of leisure. ‘For leisure does not mean idleness’, wrote T.H. Marshall in an essay on professionalism. ‘It means the freedom to choose your activities according to your own preferences and your own standards of what is best’. (Walzer 1983, 185)

Even if technology is increasingly making it more complicated to draw a definite line between working time and free time (see Kücklich 2005; Cardon and Casilli 2015), attempts to re-establish, renegotiate and reshape these boundaries are still to be considered as part of broader concerns for labor justice.

The stratified social nature of time highlights that the free time enjoyed by some can depend on the constrained time of others. As Elizabeth Anderson observes, “Michael Jordan could not make so many baskets if no one kept the basketball court swept clean.” (Anderson 1999, 321).

Workers in the highest positions can externalize some of their constraining time to workers in the lowest positions – for example, affluent families can externalize cleaning and housekeeping to migrant women. Arlie Hochschild has called this phenomenon “the outsourced self” (2012a). Yet, some authors have addressed the issue of time by essentially separating it from the issue of work, as if time was a good among others and as if it could be thought of in abstraction from working time. Distributive theorists indeed tend to isolate the issue of time from work, treating it as a “good” fit to be allocated like other goods – despite its ‘ontological eccentricity’, as it were – its fundamentally relational nature. The notion of *social division of time*, rather, highlights that time is first and foremost a social relation, while containing an implicit reference to the fact of the social division of labor.

To be sure, the distributive understanding of time is not completely implausible. After all, time is a valuable scarce resource, as the old adage “time is money” emphasizes. Talking about time as if it were a capital is thus not without reason. Analogous to Pierre Bourdieu’s economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu 2011 [1986]), one may say that time plays a key role in the social struggle for desired resources and positions in the shape of a *meta-capital*.

This is especially true in “accelerated” times as ours (Rosa 2010; Gershuny 2003). In accelerated times, time is a scarce resource whose shortage increases its value. In this economy of time, “going faster” is necessary in order to get the desired resources: “being fast becomes an *atout*” (Leccardi). It is not hard to see how easily this may become a source of inequality where some are better positioned than others by virtue of their capacity to overcome time constraints (Leccardi). In this context, as Bauman emphasizes, the «struggle for power» is fought through the «weapons of acceleration»: time becomes an arena where the capacity to go faster translates one way or another into power (Bauman, 2002, pp. 135-57; Leccardi).

Therefore, there are specifically time-related advantages and disadvantages. For instance, having a “portfolio of contacts” (Savage 2014) thanks to one’s closeness to someone socially influential provides a considerable social capital that enables the individual to invest less time into acquiring social capital than a person with a socially uninfluential family. Needless to say, social capital mediates access to a number of other valuable resources, among which is one’s access to an occupation (see Chapter IV).

This specifically temporal source of social advantage should benefit from greater attention than it has been given within distributive approaches. But can the distributive paradigm provide an adequate account of time justice? Is time a ‘good’ among other goods, fit for distribution?

Time is characterized by a sort of ontological eccentricity. It is not simply a good, nor a physical object, nor something that could be referred to as a property. It cannot be considered as entirely reducible to the size of the individual – as Émile Durkheim famously showed, “time is a social fact”. Thus it seems hard to apply distributive categories to time. One may argue, by contrast, that time is an “immaterial good”. I have proposed that within a distributive perspective time might be conceived of as a sort of “meta-capital”. Rather than a good or a resource in itself, it may be described as a condition of possibility for the acquisition of other social goods and resources. No surprise that Bourdieu so frequently refers to “time investments” when describing the nature of his capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic advantages in the social field): he observes that capital, “in its objectified or embodied forms *takes time to accumulate*” (Bourdieu 2011 [1986]). For instance, the years spent acquiring credentials in higher education are clearly time investments that are expected to turn into other goods. Time thus appears to be the ‘hidden side’ of capitals. Here a first meaning of the proverb “time is money” emerges: just like money, time is a general precondition, or a general means for the acquisition of other social goods. From these elements, it seems clear that time is a necessary, “embodied” precondition of distribution, rather than an *object* of distribution itself. Thus the essentially temporal nature of capitals – that is, of social advantages – should play a major role within the theories of justice.

However, the problem of time shows that the contributive framework is more suitable than the distributive when it comes to justice in the division of labor. For example, in the revised edition of his theory of justice, John Rawls suggests the possibility of including leisure in the list of primary goods (see Rawls 2001). But he does not take the thought further, and leaves us with a rather underdeveloped suggestion. Likewise, Michael Walzer considers free time as a “sphere of justice” in its own right (1983). Recently, some authors have taken inspiration from Rawls’ intuition and developed a distributive theory of justice of free time. Julie Rose (2016) argues for a right to “a fair share of free time”, to be conceived of as “hours for what we will” (Rose 2016, 3)¹⁶⁴. Rose contests the liberal view that represents leisure as a good that should not concern justice; free time should be rather conceived of as a “resource”, namely as an “all-purpose means” required to pursue any ends. Therefore, she reconceptualizes time as a resource necessary to pursue one’s own ends:

¹⁶⁴ When one redescribes the specific good of leisure as the resource of free time, the liberal’s neglect of time loses its foundation. If free time is a resource, then its just distribution is no longer something that *results from* just background conditions. Rather, the just distribution of free time instead must be recognized as a *component of* just background conditions. (Rose 2016, 3)

I argue that justice requires that all citizens have a fair share of free time. (...) In the same way that citizens generally require the resources of income and wealth to exercise their freedoms, so too do they generally require the resource of free time. (...) Ensuring a just distribution of income and wealth is insufficient. (Rose 2016, 4)

While Rose's attempt to include free time in a theory of distributive justice has some plausible elements, still it is questionable that the issue can be fully represented in a distributive framework. Rather, embracing the social interdependence perspective of labor justice, one is forced to see free time in its social interconnections and stratifications with respect to labor, given that labor hierarchies are also time hierarchies. The better off on the contributive ladder benefit from most time autonomy, in contrast with the worst off, who are more exposed to time heteronomy. Likewise, inequalities in contribution translate into differential access to time outsourcing. Simply put, some have greater opportunity to externalize their time constraints by "buying" time from others. Here a second meaning of the proverb 'time is money' emerges: other people's time can be bought by money. But confronted with the previous observations, this interpretation of the expression may be misleading: how could one 'buy time' if, as it has previously been said, time isn't simply a good and the 'ownership model' doesn't work?

Being centered on what people *do* rather than on what they *own*, the labor justice perspective could provide a more plausible conceptualization of time justice. People buy time from others, and when they work, people are indeed selling their time. One may buy someone else's time to clean their apartment in order to devote their time to other, more valuable purposes. The lack of recognition of care and housework as "work" is also a lack of recognition for the *time* spent in care and housework. Being recognized as "time of work" immediately means that time has social value, both symbolic and economic. Time is a matter of value.

As previously said, men and women have different access to time – or, more precisely, they enjoy different degrees of choice over how to use their time, as they are divided by an important "leisure gap" (Hochschild 1997; 2012b). The categories of work and the division of labor help to illustrate this point. If time were a good to be owned, it could be easily allocated, bought and sold. Indeed, what is to be bought is not time as an impersonal object, but rather *someone's work activity*. The difference between *time as a good* and *time as an activity* is that the latter entails the active involvement of individuals (or groups). Time in the activity-form lacks the impersonality of goods: rather, it is "embodied" in someone's labor. An essential bond ties together work and time. I refer to this as '*the social division of time*': labor, whose temporal nature cannot be questioned is divided among individuals and groups within a system of social interdependence.

One might object that 'time is money' should be once again understood in distributive terms: after all, it would suffice to redistribute money and then everybody could freely buy labor time from others in order to free their own. However, this would result in a relation of circularity; the idea that distribution presupposes contribution. The objection would tacitly suppose others' contributions as a given and as lying outside the domain of justice.

Therefore, time autonomy should be taken into consideration within a theory of justice both as a meta-resource, that is, as an embodied *precondition* for the acquisition of social advantages, and in the socially interdependent 'activity-form', entailing social inequalities and hierarchical social relations. The concept of the social division of time would constitute a cross-cutting category, involving both class and status elements seen as connected with work.

People who are better placed in terms of class, in fact, have more resources to outsource their heteronomous and constraint time to others, while those who are worst placed are forced to sell their labor time; in the status terms of gender, as previously said, women and men are divided by a crucial «leisure gap». Of course, they can outsource care and housework to others: if their resources allow them to, they might externalize these tasks and their time requirements to other women, who in turn will do the same thing with their own families. It shouldn't be underestimated here that those whose labor time is bought are mainly women from underdeveloped countries. This chain of externalization in reproductive work has been significantly referred to as “the global chains of care” (Hochschild 2000; see also Yeates 2004). As André Gorz effectively stressed:

The unequal division of labor of the economic sphere and the unequal division of time liberated by technological innovation lead to the situation in which some can buy a supplement of free time from others, while the latter are reduced to serve the former. This stratification of society is different from the stratification in classes. (Gorz 2004, 22)¹⁶⁵

The social division of time, thus, is also a social division of the value of time. In conclusion, addressing the sphere of ‘doing’ more directly and substantially than that of ‘having’, issues of time justice would better fit a paradigm based on the ‘activity-centered’ idea of contribution than that based on the ‘good-centered’ idea of distribution. Likewise, the notion of the social division of time highlights the insufficiency of the perspective of post-work views.

Therefore, a perspective of labor justice that requires that all contribute to social cooperation as peers must also include a concern for all to exercise autonomy over the time of their contribution. With this in mind, if time is understood from the perspective of contributive parity, we may conclude that inequalities in time contribution are wrong when an individual suffers from time expropriation and cannot exercise any control over her labor and free time. Precarity may thus be understood as a specifically temporal injustice when it prevents workers from autonomously managing their time of contribution as peers. Besides qualitative reservations, precarious occupations, on call work, and gig work are objectionable insofar as they entail temporal expropriation.

I argue thus that a perspective of labor justice attentive to the conditions of contribution should complement a distributive perspective on time. In order to address time justice, one is forced to take into account the social division of time, and its essential interconnections with the social division of labor. A perspective of labor justice, in shedding light on the social interdependencies among people's free time grounded on outsourcing and contributive inequalities, is better suited to dealing with time inequalities than the post-work perspective which is restricted to the subjective experience of leisure.

3. Equality for Just Work: Paul Gomberg and Iris Marion Young

Both meaningful work theories and post-work views address the problem of work from the perspective of autonomy, which is interpreted in different ways. I have highlighted that concerns for individual autonomy should not be decoupled from concerns for equality in the

¹⁶⁵ My translation. Original text : «L'inégale répartition du travail de la sphère économique et l'inégale répartition du temps que libère l'innovation technique conduisent ainsi à ce que les uns puissent acheter un supplément de temps libre à d'autres et que ceux-ci en sont réduits à se mettre au service des premiers. Cette stratification-là de la société est différente de la stratification en classes.» (Gorz 2004, 22)

division of labor and in the relations of cooperation and authority involved. Individual autonomy is in principle compatible with questionable inequalities in the division of labor, like occupational segregation and the “racial division of labor” (Gomberg 2007). Without equality, the critical-normative scope of autonomy is narrow.

Indeed, in contemporary political philosophy there are resources that might facilitate the integration of egalitarian concerns into the normative consideration of work. I have already addressed the notions of *social equality* and *participatory parity* (Chapter IV), which have proven useful for shifting the debate from individual autonomy and self-realization to a more egalitarian commitment to labor justice. These notions fit most of the conditions for labor justice advocated thus far. They are not merely distributive, because they fully recognize the importance of work (normative differentiation). They do not confine their views to the subjective experience of work, but locate it in the system of interdependence in the division of labor, both vertically and horizontally (social interdependence). They do not stop at the door of work, but address the division of labor internally (internal justice). Therefore, they may fit our concerns. I am referring here to Paul Gomberg’s theory of contributive justice and to Iris Marion Young’s democratic approach. Their models of justice raise distinctively contributive concerns. They provide very different accounts of labor justice, whose views I anticipated in Chapter II. They challenge current normative discourses on work and justice, reframing the problem in alternative ways, taking the debate beyond the shortcomings of the desirability views. In what follows, I will assess their views, and then suggest the norm of *contributive parity* as the normative core to be drawn from an egalitarian commitment to labor justice, arguing that it might be better suited than the sole principle of autonomy to developing some of their concerns into a more comprehensive framework.

3.1. *Who Toils? Paul Gomberg’s Contributive Justice*

Paul Gomberg has a very original perspective in the political-philosophical landscape. His main normative concern is that the division of labor reserves the most simple tasks for people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, he is concerned with the intermeshing between racism and the division of labor – that is, the *institutional* embeddedness of racism, and its role in shaping the organization of work¹⁶⁶. Thus, Gomberg is very sensitive to the fact of “structural social inequality” (Chapter IV). He finds that the “racial organization of labor” is an obstacle to social unity. However, he is aware that the racial division of labor “highlights the injustice of a more general social division”:

The main division is in how the labor necessary to sustain human society is organized. We divide labor in two ways. First, we separate tasks of organization from those of execution. This separation leads to a command relationship between those who control the labor process and those who labor. (...) This division between the organization of labor tasks and the execution of tasks is the division of society into a class society of laborers and those for whom they labor. Second, among those who

¹⁶⁶ “Race is a class phenomenon, but a special one. Race *is* class made visible and vicious. Race identifies demeaned class status with a human *body* that has a certain appearance. Inequality within the working class is organized through race; perception of the racialized body divides the working class. One cannot understand class in the United States (or, increasingly, anywhere else) without seeing how it is constructed through racial categories. For example, disproportionate black poverty is not just another class phenomenon. Legislation before and after World War II exempted jobs held primarily by black workers from labor protection; it created educational opportunities and housing equity for working-class white people, while black people were largely excluded. They were excluded *because they were black.*” (Gomberg 2007, 9)

labor, the work is divided into closely supervised labor requiring easily mastered skills and more complex tasks carried out under less supervision. (Gomberg 2007, 11)

Therefore, the relevant inequalities in the division of labor highlighted by Gomberg are between the *conception* and *execution* of work, and between *simple* and *complex* work. Both can be considered as pointing to different, but related sides of contributive inequality. In fact, they have an immediately hierarchical dimension when observed from the socially interdependent perspective of work:

These divisions of labor set the central problems for social and political philosophy: Who toils for whom? Who decides how labor is organized and who works? Who does the more complex and engaging labor? Can those who execute labor plans also make them? Can routine and complex labor be shared?

As seen above, philosophers tend to emphasize different aspects, or offer different readings of contributive inequality. In Gomberg's account, conception and execution tend to mirror the grade of *complexity of the task*. Recall that work complexity was also a concern expressed by Rawls' Aristotelian principle (see Chapter I) and some elements of this conception might also be found in Honneth's early self-transformation model of work (see Chapter III; see also Arnold 2012, Chap. I). However, since it belonged to the sphere of the good life rather than that of the right, Rawls did not develop a view of labor justice based on the Aristotelian principle. By contrast, Gomberg develops his conception of contributive justice precisely on the grounds that complex work is a good for which there should be real equality of opportunity. Not *competitive* equality of opportunity, however. Indeed, in his view, ideals of "competitive equality of opportunity", as Gomberg calls them, are conservative ideals, in that what they do is 'level the playing field' and then reserve certain special positions for advantaged groups (Gomberg 2007; 1995). I highlighted this point when discussing John Roemer's view (see Chapter II), which in fact is one of Gomberg's most significant critical targets.

Gomberg argues that, by demanding that people compete for few positions, competitive equality of opportunity supposes the existence of goods of limited supply. According to him, rather than modifying the criteria of the assets necessary to compete, it is at the level of the supply that we should intervene, for the simple reason that if goods are of unlimited supply, there's no need for competition. According to Gomberg, we should provide equal opportunity to develop complex abilities, to contribute to society, and to get esteem for it: in order for these goods to be of unlimited supply, we should "share both routine and complex labor" (Gomberg 2007, 2). The underlying assumption is that if routine tasks don't dominate the lives of the least advantaged thanks to task rotation, they can have the time to develop complex abilities and thus engage in more complex tasks. And, in this way they can gain social esteem.

Thus Gomberg's view lies far from the *external* justice thesis. Gomberg highlights with clarity and precision that those for whom the most simple tasks are reserved are also those who are segregated into certain neighborhoods and schools (see Bowles and Gintis 1976), and that competitive equality of opportunity does not do anything to change their situation. They are prevented from participating in most complex activities and those that they may aspire to, as we saw earlier in Bowles and Gintis' concept of "reproduction of consciousness" (Chapter IV). He sees that segregation is reproduced through all social institutions, from housing to

school and work. In order to really contrast segregation, it is thus necessary that the goods for which we compete are made unlimitedly available – for this to be possible, routine tasks should be shared.

In Gomberg's view we don't find the cautions we found in Michael Walzer's view on task rotation. To recall (see Chapter II), Michael Walzer believes that rotation can be realized only in a partial and symbolic way, because full rotation would undermine competence and specialization. Indeed, similar caution is expressed by many other authors, such as Andrea Veltman (2015), John Roemer (2008) and Goodall (2008). Veltman in particular observes that task sharing can be realized only on a small scale, whereas Goodall points out that those who perform the most complex tasks have no interest in sharing the most simple ones (2008). In Veltman's and Goodall case, objections to task rotation are thus essentially of *feasibility* (this rule cannot be realized everywhere), whereas Walzer raises more fundamental concerns of *desirability* (competency and specialization are threatened by task rotation).

The problem of competence is seen by Gomberg in a different way. Sharing tasks is supposed to enable those who perform routine tasks to develop their capacities so that they are no longer segregated off in the division of labor. Freely chosen training replaces the time liberated from drudgery thanks to rotation. Therefore, Gomberg sees accessibility to training that teaches competences as a goal in itself of task rotation. In this way, he shifts the focus from the *external* view of Roemer to an internal concern to train opportunities within the structures of work. Far less consideration is to be found in Gomberg regarding feasibility. As for the interest of the better off in pursuing contributive justice, Gomberg grounds his trust on a mutual ethical concern for others' flourishing: in the contributive justice world, all would share a genuine ethical concern for others' flourishing, and this is why they would participate in task rotation. This is a very demanding view, which attributes to individuals philanthropic feelings which do not seem to be generalizable under conditions of pragmatic pluralism.

Therefore, Gomberg's egalitarianism follows the Aristotelian tradition, according to which the exercise of one's capacities is a matter of flourishing. It sees in the development of one's capacities the key to human flourishing, as in the Sen-Nussbaum approach (see also Murphy 1993). Its distance from distributive justice, which Gomberg refers to as "*neoclassic egalitarianism*", lies in the fact that it is not grounded on comparable goods within a zero-sum game, according to which the more one has, the less another has. By contrast, Gomberg's "*opportunity egalitarianism*" has to do with non-comparable goods – capacities and internal goods that by definition cannot be subject to the zero-sum game: like the air, Gomberg says, if you breath, I breath too. Besides in comparability and non-comparability, its distance from distributive justice lies in value neutrality. According to Gomberg, distributive thinkers' rejection of perfectionism is not self-consistent, for distributive theorists also embrace values and conceptions of the good: for example, they believe in the market and defend a "moneyist" conception of the good which is far from being neutral. Thus, without claiming false neutrality, opportunity egalitarianism rejects money as a normatively valid reward for contribution: differential ownership of money leading to differential esteem for wealth becomes a "positional good" (Hirsch 1978). Therefore, Gomberg's response is that instead of money, one should see esteem as the reward for contribution: unlike money, esteem is supposed to be of unlimited supply.

Gomberg seems to overlook the weaknesses of these arguments. I identify them as *paternalism* and *coercion*. First, concerning value neutrality, one cannot merely ground one's

strong perfectionism on the premise that value neutrality is impossible. The fact that value neutrality is problematic does not imply that the only way to defend labor justice is with a strongly perfectionist view on work, and a precise interpretation of what is inherently good about work. One need not take a position on this in order to defend labor justice (see Chapter II). Second, that all should engage in complex tasks in order to get social esteem appears to be a very demanding view, not compatible with alternative conceptions of the good as well as with alternative metrics of esteem. Certainly Gomberg is right that a view cannot be fully neutral – that is why I called the pluralism of labor justice “pragmatic”, because it does not rely upon the illusion of perfect neutrality, but on a pragmatic openness to a plurality of substantive interpretations of the value of work. In Gomberg’s account the rejection of value neutrality leads to an excessive and unacceptable dose of *unnecessary* paternalism. Being inherently liable to contestation, Gomberg’s interpretation of complex work for flourishing provides a questionable teleological basis for labor justice. For example, one may think that flourishing lies in leisure, instead of complex work (Weeks 2011; Kymlicka 2002, 73; see Chapter II). If the pragmatic pluralism condition requires that labor justice be compatible with pluralistic interpretations of the good life, Gomberg’s contributive justice may not fit the purpose of labor justice.

Therefore, he should have rather embraced a pragmatic pluralist view: it is not necessary to claim to work from a position of special neutrality, or to ground labor justice on a substantive view of the meaning of work in human nature. Gomberg’s contributive justice, I argue, might be amended so as to be compatible with pragmatic pluralism. We can avoid arguing for the need of all to flourish through complex capacities on the grounds of a supposition of philanthropic commitments to others’ flourishing. Indeed, what does “complex” mean here? And why should all agree that flourishing lies in complex work rather than leisure? One may rather defend the view that all should be enabled to contribute as peers in conditions of fair social cooperation regardless of the particular interpretations that one may hold on flourishing and the intrinsic meaning of work for human nature. Institutional racism in the division of labor may thus be criticized from this egalitarian and deontological perspective, rather than on the grounds of a questionable teleological view. Moreover, it is doubtful that esteem may be available in unlimited supply, for as we have seen in Chapter III, it is inherently positional and discretionary. Nonetheless, Gomberg’s idea to “democratize” access to social esteem through task democratization is not unjustified. After all, the standards of social esteem – as John Baker notes (1987; 2015; Honneth 2010) – are defined by privileged groups. Contributive justice might, in principle, redefine these standards in a more egalitarian way. However, it would be questionable on the grounds of its incompatibility with pragmatic pluralism.

Likewise, one should not underestimate the potentially coercive outcomes of the principle of rotation. This is even more true if we consider that there seems to be no place, in Gomberg’s framework, for what people may actually think and say. That is, there seems to be no room for *self-determination*. Gomberg responds to the contributive problem through the only means of equality, completely overlooking the principle of autonomy. We find here equality without autonomy, where liberal views suffered from the opposite problem. Here we can thus appreciate the fundamental contribution of liberalism. No one is supposed to have a voice in Gomberg’s contributive world; self-determination and democracy are not just part of the framework. In principle, contributive justice may coexist with authoritarianism. Nothing in

Gomberg's framework prevents this possibility. The contributive rule of task rotation isn't expected to be subject to public scrutiny and collective deliberation; yet, agents may have different ideas on how justice in the division of labor may be implemented, for example they might believe that task rotation alone doesn't work, and that mixed contributive strategies may better fit the purpose of justice.

Attempting to fix one injustice, Gomberg is at risk of conveying another. If the distributive views are entirely grounded on the principle of free occupational choice without concern for equality, Gomberg's perspective is concerned for equality with no consideration for freedom at all. Thus, while meeting the conditions of normative differentiation (he does not reduce work to distribution) and social interdependence (he addresses the problem in terms of the division of labor, not only looking at the subjective experience of work), Gomberg's proposal does not meet the conditions of pragmatic pluralism or, one may add, take into account liberal concerns for self-determination. A possible amendment through a reinterpretation of the contributive principle in pluralist, enabling terms should thus be further explored.

However, Gomberg's view has many merits. It diagnoses with unusual sociological depth the reality of social segregation underlying contributive injustice, highlighting the weaknesses of the distributive paradigm. He correctly sees the institutional embeddedness of social inequality and the powerful role that the division of labor plays in perpetuating it. Unlike most normative models, it provides a contributive response to a contributive problem, without attributing the whole burden of justice to money redistribution (see also Gomberg 2016). Moreover, his awareness of the relational dimension of labor justice is sharp, as his view of institutionally embedded racism makes it clear. The most problematic aspects of his proposal are to be found not in its diagnosis, but rather in the constructive side of his theory. His strongly perfectionist view argues for replacing money with social esteem as a reward for contribution, and requires task rotation on the grounds of a mutual concern for flourishing which is seen as rooted in complex work. This view is easily contestable and is hardly compatible with pluralistic interpretations of the meaning of work. Therefore, despite the notable progress that Gomberg's perspective makes with respect to meaningful work and post-work theories as well as distributive theories, given the answers that it provides to the contributive problem, his theory presents significant limitations. They can be overcome by amending the theory in a deontological, pluralistic direction.

3.2. *Democratizing the Division of Labor: Iris Marion Young*

Iris Marion Young defends a perspective on justice centered on *agency* rather than *flourishing*, and on *structural justice* rather than on ethically oriented individual *feelings* of benevolence. Thus her framework appears far more suited to meeting the conditions of labor justice than Gomberg's. Young criticizes the unfairness of the division of labor on the grounds of the ideas of self-development and self-determination, which are enabling concepts, in principle acceptable by all. As Young emphasizes, "opportunity is a concept of enablement rather than possession" (Young 1990, 26). The structural impediments to self-development and self-determination are *oppression* and *domination* respectively. Oppression is not mere tyranny but more specifically the everyday practices of a society that perpetuate structures that prevent self-development. Domination is the structural exclusion of some groups from self-

determination. On Young's view, eliminating both of these structural impediments is the goal of social justice¹⁶⁷.

Young importantly highlights that these kinds of injustices cannot be fully addressed by distributive justice. One should rather look at the division of labor, which is one of the structural frameworks within which people are prevented from enjoying self-development and self-determination, in a way that is not sufficiently represented by the distributive paradigm (Young 1990). In fact, the distributive paradigm describes the opportunities as divisible outcomes, whereas they are essentially "social structures that enable or constrain the individuals in relevant situations" (26). What matters thus are the "institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation"(39). Note the stress on the *structural* character of injustice here.

Like Gomberg, Young also provides a sociologically informed account of labor injustice, however her approach is considerably different. Unlike Gomberg, Young does not ground her normative view in a paternalistic account of the meaning of work for individuals, nor does she suppose feelings of mutual benevolence. Unlike meaningful work approaches, she does not confine her view of labor justice to being a solipsistic account of the experience of work, for she sees the broader system of social cooperation as fundamentally interdependent by nature. Young also provides an account of contributive inequality, though broader and more comprehensive than Gomberg's and with no paternalistic implications:

(...) when philosophers ask about the just principles for allocating jobs and offices among persons, they typically assume a stratification of such positions. They assume a hierarchical division of labor in which some jobs and offices carry significant autonomy, decisionmaking power, authority, income, access to resources, while others lack most of these attributes. Rarely do theorists explicitly ask whether such a definition and organization of social positions is just. (Young 1990, 22)

In this account, the division of labor appears as a stratified system where the job one has fundamentally mediates one's access to a number of valuable advantages that are relevant to justice. Young effectively describes this inequality in contribution in terms of the difference between "professionals" and "nonprofessionals", which is first and foremost a "basic class division" (217). This hierarchical division of labor between task execution and task definition is socially justified by what Young calls "the myth of merit" (200), a principle central to legitimizing the "structural division between scarce highly rewarded positions and more plentiful less rewarded positions". The myth of merit relies on the assumption that once castes and natural hierarchies are replaced by hierarchies "of intellect and skill", then the hierarchical division of labor will be just. Note that similar criticisms were made also by John Rawls (1971, 101-104). Young observes that allocating scarce positions through the principle of merit is just only in presence of a neutral assessment of the candidate's skills and competences in terms of "values and culture". Which is clearly not the case: "the idea of merit criteria that are objective and unbiased with respect to personal attributes is a version of the ideal of impartiality, and is just as impossible" (202). Recall that similar reservations were expressed by Michael Walzer (1983), highlighting the fundamentally discretionary perspective and irreducible arbitrariness involved in evaluation. Young recalls that most jobs are complex and

¹⁶⁷ "Social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression. Any aspect of social organization and practice relevant to domination and oppression is in principle subject to evaluation by ideals of justice." (Young 1990, 15)

involve a multiplicity of facets, so that it is not possible to precisely identify the tasks and standards involved in those tasks; likewise, she argues that it is not possible in many jobs to identify the exact contributions of each individual, since they are difficult to measure; and finally, she observes that those who evaluate in many cases are not familiar with the working process (Young 1990, 203). This lack of neutrality can be seen in the actual hierarchical character of the division of labor:

Within the hierarchical division of labor, evaluators of merit are usually superordinate to those they evaluate, occupying positions of relative privilege. Their criteria of evaluation often emphasize norms of conformity which contribute to the smooth maintenance and reproduction of the existing relations of privilege, hierarchy, and subordination, rather than neutrally evaluating only technical competence and performance. The hierarchies of privilege in our society are clearly structured by race, gender, and other group differences (Young 1990, 205).

Thus on the one hand, criteria of impartiality unfairly universalize the particular; on the other hand, status bias shapes interactions in such a way that it influences valuations, as we saw in Chapter IV when discussing status-biased patterns of preference in hiring. On the whole, Young's reservations about merit mostly concern the *impossibility of satisfying the criteria of neutrality*. This has precise normative consequences. *If one cannot neutrally assess one's contribution, then the hierarchical division of labor is seriously called into question:*

Assuming a division between scarce highly rewarded positions and more plentiful less desirable positions as given, the merit principle asserts that this division of labor is just when no group receives privileged positions by birth or right, but these positions are instead awarded according to demonstrated individual achievement of technical competence measured by normatively and culturally neutral criteria. If, as I have argued, these positions are not and cannot be awarded in this way, then the legitimacy of a hierarchical division of labor in a society committed to the equal moral worth of all persons comes seriously into question. (Young 1990, 215)

Young's criticisms of the "myth of merit" are thus related to a broader problematization of current forms of the division of labor, seen as the structural framework within which individuals need to not be prevented from possibilities of self-development and self-expression. Being primarily structural, the obstacles do not call into question individual behaviors, as in the concept of "discrimination", but call for rethinking the organizational roots of oppression and domination.

In particular, as anticipated in Chapter II, structural oppression lying in the division of labor is identified in three "faces of oppression": exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness (Young 1990, 48-65)¹⁶⁸. These "faces of oppression" are described as structurally embedded in the division of labor and, even though they entail material consequences, they cannot be entirely reduced to them. Young's account of these faces of oppression is multidimensional and nuanced.

Exploitation is broadly described as a structural relation in which there is an unfair transfer of energies from one group to another, and where some accumulate at the expense of others. Importantly, Young's account of exploitation does not suffer the same limitations as Roemer's conception. In fact, she highlights that status plays a crucial role in exploitative relations, grounding this view in Christine Delphy's (Barthez and Delphy 1984) work, as well as on theories of racial exploitation (Reich 1981; Symanski 1985). Indeed, if exploitation can be

¹⁶⁸ I will leave aside the fifth form of oppression suggested by Young, violence, and cultural imperialism, for in her account they do not appear as primarily rooted in the division of labor (Fraser 1995).

understood as a “systematic and unreciprocated transfer of powers” (50), this has special effects on status subordinated groups, such as women and racialized people. She points out that race is a “structure of oppression” (51) that conveys specific forms of “superexploitation resulting from a segmented labor market that tends to reserve skilled, high-paying, unionized jobs for whites” (51). Thus she establishes a significant analogy between racially specific and gender-specific exploitation. In Chapter II I referred to this analogy as *status exploitation*, on the grounds of Van Parijs’ suggestion (1987). Young uses the term *menial labor* to account for this analogy (Young 1990, 52)¹⁶⁹:

In its derivation “menial” designates the labor of servants. Wherever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of the oppressed social groups are or ought to be servants of those, or some of those, in the privileged group. In most white racist societies this means that many white people have dark- or yellow-skinned domestic servants (...). Servants often attend the daily – and nightly – activities of business executives, government officials, and other high-status professionals. In our society there remains strong cultural pressure to fill servant jobs – bellhop, porter, chambermaid, busboy, and so on – with Black and Latino workers. These jobs entail a transfer of energies whereby the servers enhance the status of the served. (Young 1990, 52)

The category of menial labor does not apply only to service. Young stresses that it refers to “any servile, unskilled, low-paying work lacking in autonomy, in which a person is subject to taking orders from many people” (52). It is “auxiliary work, instrumental to the work of others” where the latter receive “primary recognition for doing the job”. The distributive paradigm is weakly equipped to grasp the normative issues at stake in menial labor, and more precisely the exploitative relationship that it embodies. The distributive understanding of exploitation points to a mere difference in wealth, whereas exploitation more properly refers to a “relationship of force between capitalists and workers” that occurs “within coercive structures that give workers few options” (53). Therefore, by allocating goods one may hardly solve the problem: what must be done, rather, is to reorganize institutions and practices of decision-making, as well as alter the division of labor (Young 1990, 53). Note that gender and racial biased exploitation fit the categories of structural status inequality considered in Chapter IV (see Tilly 1998).

As “perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression” (53), *marginalization* is another form in which racism is expressed; it involves expulsion “from useful participation in social life” (1990, 53). In other words, “marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use” (53). Note that Young’s distinction between marginalization and exploitation recalls Charles Tilly’s distinction between exploitation and opportunity hoarding, where the latter works as a system of exclusion instead of free-riding on the work of others (Tilly 1998; see Chapter IV). Marginalization exceeds the distributive paradigm in that it prevents people from exercising their capacities “in socially defined and recognized ways” (54), which thus cannot be addressed through allocations of goods, for “marginalization does not cease to be oppressive when one has shelter and food” (55)¹⁷⁰.

Finally, *powerlessness* is described as a “lack of authority, status, and a sense of self” (1990, 57). Once again, Young’s account is multidimensional. Powerlessness is a form of oppression suffered by nonprofessionals as an additional condition of exploitation (56). Nonprofessionals lack authority in that: they don’t have career prospects; they cannot influence the decisions of

¹⁶⁹ For a recent proposal on the concept of “intersectional exploitation”, see McKeown 2017.

¹⁷⁰ On the concept of marginalization as “non-contribution” see Seglow 2013.

their supervisors and thus essentially lack autonomy at work; and they lack “respectability” – that is, they do not fit the socio-cultural code associated with professional culture. The idea of respectability (see also Skeggs 1997; Wright Mills and Jacobi 2002; Weeks 2011; Hughes 2017 [1958]) might be considered as the ideological side of the idea of recognition, with a special connection to labor hierarchies¹⁷¹. Indeed, it seems to me that all of the features that Young ascribes to powerlessness may be more fundamentally described in terms of social inequality, even though no doubt social inequality is a form of powerlessness. Thus, powerlessness consists of the “inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decisionmaking power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies. These injustices have distributional consequences, but are more fundamentally matters of the division of labor” (Young 1990, 58).

These “faces of oppression” have at least two aspects in common: they are rooted in structures rather than individual behaviours, and they exceed the distributive paradigm of justice for they are rooted in the division of labor. For this reason, Young’s response is not grounded in the allocation of goods, but rather in *democratization*. Workplace democracy is expected to undermine the distinction between task definition and task execution – for the same reasons that governments should be democratic (Young 1990, 223). Recent literature has further confirmed these intuitions – consider, for example, the work of Isabelle Ferreras, *Firms as Political Entities*, and Elizabeth Anderson’s *Private Government* – both use the state-firm analogy in order to criticize the lack of *rule of law* in the firm, described as analogous to state dictatorship (Ciepley 2013; Landemore and Ferreras 2015; Ferreras 2017; Anderson 2017). This analogy traces back to before Young’s work to Carole Pateman (1970), and more broadly to a longstanding, wide literature on workplace democracy (Schweickart 1980; Gould 1988; Cohen 1989).

In Young’s view, workplace democracy requires the participation of workers in the basic decisions of the enterprise as a whole, as well as in their immediate work situation (223). Top authorities unilaterally exercising power would thus no longer hold a decisional monopoly, even though this would not mean that they would be ruled out: rather, limits would be set on the exercising of their authority. Interestingly, Young also includes in her democratic account of the division of labor the communities affected by companies, which are seen as deserving representation because their interests are affected by the economic decisions of these units (223). However, note that this account has the undesirable consequence of being confined to the formal economy, and it is not clear how and whether this may be extended to other organizations – for instance, in what sense would contributive injustice in the household be fixed through democracy? Since her “democratic division of labor” isn’t systematically developed, the aspects of this form of democracy should be explored further.

On the whole, Young’s ideas suggest that her notion of democratic decision-making as a response to the unfair division of labor is broader than traditional accounts of workplace democracy. The latter are in fact generally confined to the perimeters of the firm, whereas

¹⁷¹ “The norms of respectability in our society are associated specifically with professional culture. Professional dress, speech, tastes, demeanor, all connote respectability. Generally professionals expect and receive respect from others. (...) Professionals typically receive more respectful treatment than nonprofessionals. For this reason nonprofessionals seeking a loan or a job, or to buy a house or a car, will often try to look “professional” and “respectable” in those settings. The privilege of this professional respectability appears starkly in the dynamics of racism and sexism. In daily interchange women and men of color must prove their respectability. At first they are often not treated by strangers with respectful distance or deference. Once people discover that this woman or that Puerto Rican man is a college teacher or a business executive, however, they often behave more respectfully toward her or him.” (Young 1990, 57-58)

Young extends democracy also to the outside of it: for instance, to customers and to those who are in one way or another affected by the firm's economic activity. Young's is thus a demanding model of democracy, rather than a formal or merely procedural one. In this way, her view is comparable in spirit to Schwartz'. Note that the basic assumption of labor democratization is that firms and labor organizations of all sorts should not be exempted from the norm of self-determination: a view that Young develops even before Schwartz, in 1979, but after Carol Pateman (1970; Young 1979). Very importantly, this interpretation gives the voice of workers a pivotal role in defining what labor justice should look like.

As for our concerns, the question of who will toil even in a democratic division of labor, remains a difficult open question that democracy may not be able to address alone. The "somebody's got to do it problem" would require that democracy on the subject be extended beyond limited economic units. Pre-existing forms of exclusion and confinement to the lowest levels of educational attainment and skills acquisition may prevent people from democratic participation..

The model of *contributive responsibility* and the democratic model of co-authoring the norms that regulate the division of labor within the system of social cooperation suggest a normative core of labor justice that calls for further exploration and experimentation. Young thus provides a reading of the division of labor as a structure that should be liable to democratic self-definition.

3.3. *Two Principles of Labor Justice: Contribution and Democratization*

Both Gomberg and Young address the normative problem of work and the division of labor from perspectives of equality. However, they do this in considerably different ways, and with very different goals in mind. First, they can be considered as providing two different accounts of *contributive inequality*: the "racial division of labor" in Gomberg, and "the division between professional and nonprofessionals" in Young. Both of these sets of inequalities ultimately refer to a hierarchical division between task planners and executors. Whereas Gomberg's response to the problem is to favor *task equalization*, Young advocates *democratized participation*.

Second, they ground their criticisms of contributive inequality on distinct normative concerns: *human flourishing* in Gomberg's case, and *self-determination* and *self-development* in Young's. I earlier observed that a concern for self-determination is dangerously lacking in Gomberg's view, running the risk of a coercive account of justice that perpetuates one injustice while attempting to fix another. An idea of self-development is present in both accounts. Gomberg interprets it in a demanding, ethically loaded way, in terms of flourishing through the exercise of complex capacities, whereas Young interprets it as an enabling concept that is negatively prevented by oppressive social structures.

However, I have argued that if Gomberg's view is properly amended so as to be compatible with the requirements of pragmatic pluralism and with liberal concerns for self-determination, these two views could be viewed as complementary to each other. Young's account may be seen as offering democratic strategies to counterbalance the essential lack of concerns for self-determination in Gomberg's account. Gomberg's theory may compliment Young's view by pushing her democratic concerns for labor justice beyond decision-making processes, and towards a more direct concern for the way tasks and roles are actually set. If conceived of in these deontological, structural and complementary terms, these views may be seen as mutually

supporting one another. They may work together to produce a *contributive principle of routine task rotation* and a *democratic principle of self-determination* for labor justice.

The contributive principle could be said to involve a critical perspective on the way tasks and roles are organized, thus requiring some sort of *contributive responsibility* aimed at lightening the contributive burden with which some groups are especially overloaded, and problematizing the contributive advantages that others benefit from at their expense. The democratic principle could require a commitment to people’s self-determination when addressing concerns for labor justice – that is, people’s voices should really count in the defining of one’s work. Note that, re-interpreted this way, the integration of the contributive and democratic elements somewhat reflects Adina Schwartz’ proposal (see above) according to which jobs must be «democratically redesigned, tasks must be shared out in a way that abolishes the distinction between those who decide and those who execute others’ decisions» (Schwartz 1982, 641). But whereas Schwartz’ exclusive normative ground is the norm of autonomy, Young and Gomberg’s views express a more articulated commitment to equality that still does not renounce (in Young’s case) the value of self-determination.

The justifications they provide for their principles of labor justice are different. Gomberg justifies the principle of rotation of the less desirable tasks by appealing to a precise view of human flourishing as the development of one’s capacities through complex activities. The tasks are to be shared, thus, because all should have the chance to flourish and obtain social esteem. Young, by contrast, justifies her democratic view on the basis of a scepticism of the possibility of neutrality claimed by the meritocratic principle, which legitimates the division of labor between planners and executors, and of a conception of justice as an enabling concept centered on *agency*. In her view, all should have the chance to participate in decisions concerning their work, because the hierarchical division of labor threatens workers’ opportunities for self-development and self-determination. In terms of multidimensionality, thus, Gomberg’s contributive justice stresses the *contributive* and *relational* sides of the question, because it is concerned with the nature of tasks and roles (contributive), and because it sees the structural embeddedness of racial inequality (relational). Young’s democratic division of labor acknowledges the importance of distribution (*distributive*), but expands the scope of justice towards democratic participation (*democratic*), with particular sensitivity to the *relational* dimension of justice. Note that neither of their accounts are restricted to the subjective experience of work, but problematize the social interdependencies which relate to it. However, Gomberg’s view does not meet the requirements of pluralism (because of paternalism and strong perfectionism), deontology (it is a teleological view), and self-determination (it has no concern for autonomy). These differences can be summed up as follows:

Models of Labor Justice	Normative differentiation/ Multidimensionality	Social Interdependence	Pragmatic Pluralism	Deontological	Internal view	Self-Determination
Paul Gomberg	Partially met (contributive and relational)	x	/	/	x	/

Iris Marion Young	Partially met (distributive, democratic and relational)	x	x	x	x	x
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As the table shows, Young’s view is superior to Gomberg’s. Her account includes a structural concern for labor justice that does not scrutinize individuals’ behaviors in a paternalistic fashion, while still pursuing concerns for equality in the definition of the division of labor. However, it is not necessary to make a choice between these accounts. They both provide valuable, original insights for an account of labor justice, and the insights that each provides are often missing in the other. Rather than choosing between them, one may take advantage of their joint consideration. Gomberg may compliment Young’s account with more substantive concerns for contributive responsibility about the actual way tasks and roles are defined, so that it is not confined to decision-making processes. Likewise, Gomberg’s contributive concerns are in vital need of democracy because of the risks of authoritarianism and paternalism.

4. Contributive Parity: A Multidimensional Approach

As I have done in earlier chapters, I will consider the desirability and the egalitarian views of work as providing resources that can help to conceptualize different dimensions of labor justice. The *distributive-economic* dimension of labor justice points to aspects of income, wage, and access to occupations (Chapter I and II), and the *social-relational* dimension addresses the quality of social relations in the subjective experience of work and in the division of labor (Chapter III and IV). However, neither of these dimensions consider the internal aspects of work along with its organizational norms and practices. For this reason, it is worth distinguishing other dimensions of labor justice, which focus more specifically on the aspects highlighted by the desirability and labor egalitarian views: the *contributive* and *democratic* dimensions respectively. Let us first focus on the former.

4.1. *The Contributive Dimension of Labor Justice*

Meaningful work theories are interested in determining a threshold according to which work is objectionable by regarding the internal features of work as a subjective experience. Authors of this tradition emphasize features of *autonomy*, *initiative*, *intelligence*, participation in *meaning* creation, and *complexity*. We may redefine these aspects deontologically, without appealing to an ethically overloaded view of work as self-realization. Thus, we may redefine:

- *autonomy* as participation in the determination of the aspects concerning one’s work and the basic goals of the broader organization in which it is included;
- *initiative* as a cognitive precondition of autonomy;
- negatively, *complexity* as the contrary of routine and meaningless tasks.

These definitions are compatible with pragmatic pluralism, and they are sustained by empirical research (Kohn and Schooler 1978; 1982).

Post-work views, by contrast, tend to emphasize the normative importance of *free time*, by demanding the reduction of the working week as an aspect of the ethic of the “refusal of work”.

The discussion has shown that labor time is chiefly important, even though post-work views tend to focus on the subjective side of the issue, without contextualizing their concerns within what I have been referring to as “the social division of time”. This quantitative aspect of time within the contributive dimension should thus be considered both from a subjective and social perspective. Individual time autonomy and a fair social division of time are to be considered jointly. In normative terms, this would mean that *time heteronomy* should be reduced as much as possible both on an individual and social level.

We can thus discern at least two aspects within the contributive dimension of labor justice: the *qualitative* and the *quantitative*. The former point to the “*what*” and “*how*” of work; the latter to the “*how much*” and “*when*” of work. The contributive dimension of labor justice should internally involve both the quality and quantity of work.

However, this is only half of the story. In fact, the desirability views do not go beyond the subjective experience of work. In this way, they don’t meet the social interdependence condition, which is by contrast present in the labor egalitarian view of Paul Gomberg. His model extends the normative gaze from the subjective experience of work to the division of labor, connecting these two levels as a matter of justice. In Gomberg’s view, *task rotation* throughout the division of labor is a requirement of justice. Given that complexity is necessary in order to develop one’s capacities and to get social esteem, all workers should have access to complex occupations, and task rotation enables them to have more time for freely chosen training. In this case, the contributive dimension takes the shape of the contributive remedy to labor injustice – *task rotation*.

However, this need not be the exclusive remedy. Reservations about the feasibility of this solution on a wide scale (Veltman 2015; Goodall 2008; see §) are indeed reasonable. Therefore, mixed and plural solutions should be preferred. Other possible contributive remedies to labor injustice include: automation of undesired tasks; corvée; coordination with other activities; partial rotation; leisure compensation; doing one’s own dirty work; working day limitations (see also Chapter II). All of these remedies may be considered as part of a plurality of *contributive strategies* that could be implemented on different scales through the mediation of democratic decision-making. There is no reason to restrict the contributive dimension to task rotation. Likewise, the combination of contributive justice and democracy seems particularly relevant in order to prevent coercive and authoritarian outcomes.

For now, thus, consider that the contributive dimension of labor justice specifically includes:

- 1) the *qualitative* aspects of the *subjective experience* of work (insights from meaningful work theory in a deontological perspective);
- 2) the *quantitative* aspects of *time* (insights from the post-work view in both an individual and social perspective);
- 3) the *qualitative* and *quantitative* aspects of the *division of labor* (insights from labor egalitarian views, plus a plurality of mixed contributive strategies).

These aspects may be considered as strands of the contributive dimension of labor justice. Considered together, and amending the most paternalistic aspects towards a more deontological spirit, they address different, but complementary questions of justice on the quality and quantity of work both from a subjective and social point of view.

To recapitulate, the qualitative side of labor justice concerns, at the subjective level, autonomy, initiative, and complexity in the individual experience of work, and at a social level,

norms, practices and organizational regimes of the division of labor. The quantitative side of labor justice concerns, at the subjective level, the amount of time autonomy that the individual enjoys, and at a social level, the social availability of free time in the social division of time. By considering these aspects together, one may say that the contributive dimension of labor justice requires more than the classic principle “work all, work less”: indeed, it could be seen as entailing the norm “work all, work fair, work less”. Work should be fair; it is not sufficient that it is “less”.

The Contributive Dimension of Labor Justice		
	Qualitative	Quantitative
Normative question	<i>The “what” and “how” of work</i>	<i>The “how much” and “when” of work</i>
Subjective	Autonomy, initiative, complexity in the individual experience of work	Time autonomy/reduction of time heteronomy
Social	Norms, practices, organizational regimes of the division of labor	Social availability of free time; fair social division of time

Like the other dimensions of labor justice discussed earlier, the contributive dimension points to a specific form of labor injustice. Recall that the economic-distributive dimension was concerned with exploitation and material need, while the relational dimension looked at patterns that treat others as inferiors, both at an interactional and structural level. The contributive dimension, rather, points to forms of labor injustice that may be called *miscontribution* and *contributive subordination*.

Miscontribution refers to qualitatively and quantitatively objectionable work from the perspective of the subject, assessed in terms of the autonomy, initiative and meaning necessary for work to be meaningful on a pragmatic pluralist basis. *Contributive subordination* may be defined as qualitatively and quantitatively objectionable forms of division of labor, according to the standards of contributive parity that require that all contribute to social cooperation as peers.

Miscontribution and contributive subordination should be understood as internally intertwined and connected with one another. Indeed, one’s misconception often has its roots into one’s contributive subordination, and contributive subordination is substantiated by individuals’ misconception. For example, the widely criticized distinction between task definition and task execution is experienced not only by subjects in the form of routine tasks, and thus as a lack of autonomy, initiative, and complexity in the subjective experience of work, but extends also to the division of labor as a wider hierarchy which structures and assigns tasks and roles. That is, as the social interdependence condition requires, one cannot isolate the subjective experience of work from the broader context of the division of labor. Therefore, if one experiences low levels of autonomy in the workplace and little supervision, this should be seen as connecting to an unequal division of labor between task planners and task executors that stratifies access to autonomy and initiative. Not all forms of work can be normatively addressed through merely subjective grids. For example, occupational segregation may co-exist with subjects experiencing autonomy, complexity and initiative in their work, whereas

the division of labor in which they find themselves becomes objectionable only once the gaze is extended beyond the individual and a norm of contributive parity is embraced. I argue that these concepts enable a better understanding of the normative issues at stake at work and the division of labor, thereby enabling a better response.

Note that the concept of contributive subordination specifies the notion of *contributive inequality* as something more than a mere difference in contribution (see Introduction), namely as referring more precisely to a relationship of inequality where some benefit from contributive advantages grounded in the contributive disadvantages of others – that is, such inequality involves a *relationship* where some are better off and others worst off, in contributive terms – concerning the quality and quantity of their contribution.

Labor Injustice in the Contributive Dimension		
	Qualitative	Quantitative
Subjective	<i>Miscontribution</i> Heteronomy, constraints to initiative, routine tasks	<i>Time heteronomy</i>
Social	<i>Contributive subordination</i> Norms, practices, organizational regimes of the division of labor that prevent individuals from contributing to social cooperation as peers	<i>Unfair social division of time</i>

If the injustice of the *economic-distributive* dimension was generally maldistribution (or exploitation), and the injustice of the *relational* dimension was misrecognition and social inequality, miscontribution and contributive subordination are forms of injustice specifically rooted in the division of labor and irreducible to aspects of income or recognition, even though they are deeply connected with the economic and the relational dimensions. Considering the *contributive dimension* as a distinctive sphere of labor justice thus enables us to address the specific features of work as irreducible normative matters. One cannot merely point to income or to social relations, for also the internal character of work, both subjective and social, should count for labor justice.

Once again, its distinctiveness does not entail that it is not in connection with other dimensions. Rather, we should consider the specific, distinctive form of injustice in the contributive dimension as deeply connected to the other dimensions. To recall, in Chapter IV I highlighted the internally plural nature of labor injustice this way:

	Distributive	Relational	Contributive
Labor Injustice	Material insecurity, wage injustice, exploitation, opportunity hoarding, economic marginalization	Misrecognition at work, stigmatization, status-biased hiring, occupational segregation	Miscontribution and contributive subordination

Note that I have not yet specified the aspects of the *democratic* dimension of labor justice.

4.2. *The Democratic Dimension of Labor Justice*

As I explained earlier, the democratic dimension is less considered than other dimensions in the thesis, not because it counts for less, but rather because it was one of the primary aims of the thesis to address underexplored dimensions of labor justice, such as distributive, relational and contributive dimensions, whereas the democratic approach is the most developed and investigated in the literature. Nonetheless, I have considered Iris Marion Young’s approach as a model that encapsulates many fundamental traits of labor democracy. She goes beyond usual accounts of workplace democracy in that her view has a potentially broader scope, going beyond the ‘perimeter’ of the firm. From this perspective, the democratic dimension of labor justice can be considered as consisting in an extension of individual self-determination in the division of labor (Young 1979). Processes of decision-making and structures of control should be organized in such a way that all those involved can have a say, and so that their voices really count. Recall that Adina Schwartz (1982) pointed out the importance of sharing relevant information for these purposes, because a merely procedural workplace democracy without substantive information sharing does not undermine unequal contributive patterns and rather tends to favor the better off. If the *democratic* dimension of labor justice requires that all take part in decisions that affect their work, injustice in this dimension thus consists of being excluded from peer participation in decision-making processes that affect one’s work.

The internally plural nature of labor injustice should thus correspond to a multidimensional response of labor justice, which may thus be summed up this way:

Dimensions of labor justice	Economic-Distributive	Relational	Contributive	Democratic
Remedies to Labor Injustice	Equal freedom from need for free occupational choice; equality of opportunity; fair access to the outcomes of one’s contribution; fair access to socially produced wealth	Being treated as equals both in interactions and in the structures of the division of labor	Autonomy, initiative and complexity in the subjective experience of work; fair labor time; mixed contributive strategies to enhance contributive parity in the division of labor	Participating in democratic decision-making and information sharing on the aspects concerning one’s work

In the following sections, I will explore the interconnections among these dimensions, arguing that the goal of contributive parity is better pursued when they are considered together.

4.3. *A Multidimensional Approach*

I highlighted earlier that the principles of autonomy and freedom are the most widespread normative responses to labor injustice in contemporary debates. Distributive theorists, recognition theorists, meaningful work and post-work advocates, all agree that autonomy and freedom – variously interpreted – are the values with which to ground a response to objectionable work. In contrast, I have argued that autonomy without equality has limited

normative scope. When considered, equality is mostly addressed as a matter of income, but the discussion has shown that some notion of equality is necessary beyond distribution in order to rethink work and its structures. I have found an egalitarian commitment to labor justice useful to this end in Paul Gomberg’s and Iris Marion Young’s approaches. Whereas Gomberg grounds his view on an Aristotelian and teleological view of contributive justice, Young better fits the requirements of pragmatic pluralism, since her concerns for self-determination and self-development against structural oppression and domination through the division of labor are compatible with competing interpretations of the ethical meaning of work. Young sees in democratization a response to unjust divisions of labor; more precisely, to cases of exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness. However, specific concerns for the organization of tasks, and the role and the nature of the occupations may be fruitfully integrated into her account through Gomberg’s perspective. On the other hand, Gomberg’s concern for what I have called contributive responsibility lacks resources for self-determination necessary to prevent authoritarian outcomes, which are rather provided by Young’s account. Therefore, their views may be considered as complementary, providing contributive and democratic tools that could be understood as operating jointly. This requires, however, the withdrawal of Gomberg’s teleological account, and a deontological re-interpretation of contributive justice.

Rather than choosing between them, I have suggested the norm of *contributive parity* as a way to express egalitarian concerns at work in a more comprehensive, inherently multidimensional way. Contributive parity translates the normative insights of both the norms of *social equality* and *participatory parity* discussed earlier (Chapter IV) into the world of work. In this way, it also interprets the egalitarian concerns differently expressed by both Gomberg and Young. Both of these concepts meet the conditions of pragmatic pluralism and are deontological in character, while expressing egalitarian concerns. Recall that social equality points to an ideal of society where all members interact as equals not only in one-to-one behaviors, but also in social structures that play a role in the reproduction of contributive inequality. The idea of participatory parity expresses a broader concern for equality in participation in social life, to be realized in the absence of economic, social and political obstacles (maldistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation). Fraser argues that all should participate in social life as peers, and that for this to be possible, obstacles to peer participation of an economic, social and political nature should be overcome.

Participatory Parity (Nancy Fraser)		
Distribution	Recognition	Representation

In Chapters III and IV, I proposed to complement Fraser’s theory by expanding the sphere of recognition to a broader concern for social equality, drawing on relational egalitarian debates, and by distinguishing a further dimension of justice, that of contribution. In this way, the multidimensionality of participatory parity may be extended both beyond recognition and beyond distribution. The initial framework of participatory parity has thus offered the blueprint for an alternative understanding of labor justice beyond the shortcomings of distributive justice and recognition theory, as well as of contributive justice. Translating

participatory parity into a more explicit concern for fair work, the concept of *contributive parity* may be understood as internally involving a plurality of dimensions of labor justice.

Therefore, understood in this way, contributive parity incorporates a relational concern for social equality in that it requires that no one be institutionally treated as an inferior in the division of labor or in one-to-one interactions. It also incorporates a participatory concern in that work is one of the most important forms in which people participate in social cooperation in terms of contribution. Likewise, it incorporates a contributively egalitarian concern in that it requires that contributive strategies be applied in order for all not to be prevented from contributing to social cooperation as peers.

Before specifying further the concept of contributive parity, let me highlight the advantages of utilizing Fraser's perspective. On the whole, the shortcomings of distributive and recognitive paradigms of justice that a reformulation of Fraser's model may allow us to overcome are essentially of three kinds:

- 1) *One-dimensionality*. Most normative approaches tend to be focused only on either distributive, recognition (or democratic) sides of work. Instead of conceptualizing labor justice as being exclusively addressed by one of these spheres, I argue that work may be more adequately understood as simultaneously involving a number of different dimensions, which other paradigms of justice tend to consider to be mutually exclusive.
- 2) *The antithesis between paternalism and value neutrality*. So far, the thesis has drawn the conclusion that work and the division of labor should concern justice rather than the good, that a deontological perspective should be preferred to a teleological one, and that what should be rejected in dealing with labor justice is any form of normative monism. All of these concerns fit Fraser's model of justice. In her proposal, Nancy Fraser contests Honneth's normative monism on recognition in favor of a two- and then three-dimensional perspective, and has argued for a deontological, rather than teleological approach on justice for the sake of pluralism. Thus my claims may find useful conceptual tools and resources in Fraser's approach, for a more articulated perspective on work. Contemporary philosophical perspectives on work tend to be caught in a false antithesis between the liberal refusal of labor justice (distributive models) and the perfectionist readings of work as self-realization (recognition model and meaningful work views). On the one hand, distributive and liberal theorists (see Chapter II) tend to dismiss labor as a matter of "private preference", arguing that defending labor justice requires an ethically perfectionist perspective incompatible with pluralistic conceptions of the good. On the other hand, most normative approaches on work tend to address work in ethical terms of self-realization, rooted in a somewhat defined "human nature" or in some essentialist definition of work and happiness. This polarization of the debate between those who deny all normative interest in work, and those who defend it in ethically loaded terms, ends up representing work as a norm-free zone, so that current forms of division of labor are naturalized. That is, the unintended outcome of this impasse is that the sphere of work is excluded from the realm of justice. The dichotomy can be avoided, I have argued, by rejecting its underlying premise: that is, the idea that the only way to defend labor justice is by appealing to ethical self-realization. Shifting the focus from the ethical to the moral ground would allow us to bring work back to the realm of justice (*vs paternalism*). Paternalism, indeed, provides a highly contestable and thus very weak

basis for labor justice, since different interpretations of the ethical meaning of work may legitimately co-exist in contemporary societies.

- 3) *Subjectivism*. Avoiding the self-realization perspective would allow us to go beyond the subjectivist focus on work. Subjectivism conceptualizes work as a solipsistic activity, preventing us from seeing it for what it actually is: a social relation within a broader network of asymmetrical interdependences, as the concepts of organization, social division of labor, and global chains of value show.

One-dimensional, paternalist and subjectivist accounts of work should thus be replaced by a multidimensional perspective, which conceptualizes the social relations of interdependence involved in work without taking a position among the competing ethical understandings of the inherent meaning of work. Nancy Fraser’s model of justice may provide a fertile ground for developing such a conception of labor justice, thanks to its deontological, universalistic, multidimensional, and egalitarian perspective.

A contributive reinterpretation of Fraser’s egalitarian principle of participatory parity – what may be called the *principle of fair contribution to social cooperation as peers* – is suggested as a more viable moral basis for labor justice, alternative to current normative views on work which are exclusively centered on autonomy and freedom.

Contributive Parity: Dimensions of Labor Justice			
Economic-Distributive	Social-Relational	Political-Democratic	Contributive (qualitative/quantitative)

Note that each of these dimensions has been drawn from the discussion of alternative models of justice. The economic-distributive dimension of labor justice required that the distributive conditions for work to be fair – one of its norms was the principle of equal freedom from need, without which no free occupational choice is possible. The social-relational dimension of labor justice was drawn from the discussion of recognition theory and relational egalitarianism, which offered the normative grids with which to assess interactional and structurally embedded status inequalities in labor hierarchies – thus requiring that no one’s social status affect their role in the division of labor, and that one’s position in the division of labor does not turn into social status. The political-democratic dimension was drawn both from Adina Schwartz’ self-determination model of meaningful work and from Iris Marion Young’s commitment to the democratization of the division of labor. Finally, the contributive dimension concerning the quantitative and the qualitative aspects of work, has benefited from the insights of meaningful work, post-work theories, as well as Paul Gomberg’s contributive model. According to these insights, the internal aspects of work quality should include autonomy, initiative, and meaning (quality), whereas the quantitative side of the question calls for a reduction of labor time for all and increased time autonomy.

Contributive parity calls for the joint realization of the requirements of all of these dimensions. That is, in order for people to contribute to social cooperation as peers, the economic, relational, political and contributive conditions of labor justice should be satisfied. In other words, work and the division of labor cannot be fair if one is not free from material need and an unconditional access to resources is not equally available to all (*distributive*); if one is treated as an inferior and socially unequal structures reproduce status inequalities

(*relational*); if one cannot take part in decisions concerning their work, and structures of power and control are democratically designed (*democratic*); and if one experiences heteronomy, lack of initiative and routine labor, as well as time heteronomy at work (*contributive*). Therefore, contributive parity is a multidimensional norm that is better realized when all the dimensions are simultaneously satisfied.

Contributive Parity				
<i>Dimensions of Labor Justice</i>	Economic-Distributive	Social-Relational	Political-Democratic	Contributive (qualitative, quantitative)
<i>Main normative question</i>	What are people entitled to receive?	What are people worth?	Who decides and how?	Who does what, and when?
<i>Principles</i>	Equal freedom from material need; equality of opportunity; fair access to socially produced wealth	Interactional and structural social equality in the division of labor	Free occupational choice; autonomy in the workplace; workplace democracy	Contribution to social cooperation as peers, both in qualitative and quantitative sense
<i>Social Structures/ Subjects Involved</i>	Class	Status	Decision-making norms and practices	Division of labor
<i>Justice</i>	Equality of opportunity; equal consideration; equal freedom from material need for real free occupational choice	Social equality	Democratic participation	Contributive fairness

Contributive parity is an egalitarian, multidimensional, deontological norm requiring that all individuals benefit from fair conditions in their contribution to social cooperation, and that for this to be possible, obstacles of an economic, social, political and contributive nature should be either eliminated or reduced through a series of strategies, either affirmative or transformative in character. This principle interprets the moral norm of participatory parity in a contributive sense – referring to the contributions that individuals give to society creating value, both in the formal and informal economy – which interprets in turn the principle of equal moral worth of all people. Among its advantages, it is not individualistic, unlike meaningful work approaches and, at the same time, it does not prescribe to individuals what should they think about the intrinsic ethical meaning of work. It is not grounded in a particular view about the essence of human nature, but still it does not renounce a normative perspective on work, unlike distributive views. It states that, regardless of the ethical interpretations that individuals give of work, it is necessary to provide fair conditions of social cooperation from the perspective of “doing” (labor or contributive justice) besides just “owning” (distributive justice). *Contributive parity allows us to consider concerns for equality and concerns for labor justice as unique, comprehensive normative demands.*

Aside from the resources provided by the debate on social justice and equality, the norm of contributive parity gives expression to implicit and explicit normative conflicts in the

organization of work throughout society. It is thus grounded on real conflicts, and points to implicit moral demands already present in society. Protests on the duration of the labor day under the Industrial Revolution, which nowadays take the shape of concerns for a work-life balance, as well as contributive struggles around the division of labor, express demands to rethink the organization of labor that neither the distributive paradigm nor the recognition perspective fully represent.

The specificity of contributive parity with respect to other views may be better appreciated in comparison with the norms of other models of justice addressed thus far. According to the distributive view, injustice lies in the unfair distribution of goods. According to the recognition view, injustice lies in misrecognition. Concepts of contributive subordination and miscontribution point to the highly stratified nature of the division of labor where some have little choice but to occupy the lowest rungs of the ladder of work. Contributive parity enables us to criticize contributive inequality, not merely because it limits access to material resources or because it misrecognizes people, but more broadly because it prevents them from contributing as peers. Likewise, contributive parity does not criticize unequal divisions of labor because they don't enable self-realization. The norm is thus inherently multidimensional, because it sees the plurality of dimensions involved in labor injustice, and claims that contributive parity can be better implemented when they are addressed jointly.

What we could learn from the sociological fact of differentiation (Schimank 2015; Luhmann 1977; Walzer 1983; Honneth 2017; Scanlon 2000; 2018; Fraser 2003) is to avoid any reduction of one dimension of labor justice into another. This means that the economic-distributive perspective cannot fully respond to demands for labor justice; labor-social inequality cannot be addressed simply through economic remedies. For example, the low prestige of some categories of occupations cannot be simply redressed by means of higher wages. I have proposed to call this fact of mutual irreducibility of the dimensions the *normative differentiation condition*. This condition postulates that, even if inequalities often go together, each dimension of inequality should be intended as being rooted in discrete social realities and as raising distinct normative concerns, calling for distinct normative responses. The thesis has shown that when this condition is not satisfied, labor justice fails to be addressed. If the economic-distributive dimension is rooted in social class, the social-relational dimension in social status and the political dimension in structures of decision-making, contributive dimension has to do with the division of labor. The dimensions identified are thus not arbitrary. They refer to discrete social realities, which raise corresponding distinctive concerns. Further arguments can be found in the growing literature of the last number of decades regarding the complexity of equality (see Scanlon 2000; 2017; Wolff 1997; 2013; Anderson 1999; Fraser 2003). Relations, decision-making processes, and the nature of tasks and their social organization all exceed the scope of allocative equality. Note that in principle nothing prevents the integration of further dimensions.

My formulation is indebted both to Fraser's and Walzer's pluralistic accounts, but it considerably modifies and widens their scope and overall rationale. I have already explained in what ways my account differs from Fraser's (see Chapters III and IV), and thus I will specify here where the difference lies with Walzer. Unlike Walzer's view, rather than being mere sub-cases of distribution, each dimension is considered as following its own normative logic. Moreover, my account is not critically grounded on "shared social meanings", because it acknowledges the conservative risks that this perspective may entail. Shared social meanings

cannot operate as an unquestioned authority determining the boundaries of the spheres. Besides being based on what people currently think, other normative considerations should equip our views on labor justice. Moreover, whereas Walzer's idea of "complex equality" is primarily addressed against manifestations of "simple equality", the perspective that I propose is rather addressed against what may be called "simple freedom", a far more spread perspective in political theory when it comes to labor. Nonetheless, my view maintains that work should be considered as cross-cutting a number of spheres, and develops this intuition within a broader framework than the distributive account. Importantly, whereas Walzer sees injustice in the interference among spheres, I consider the dimensions of labor justice as linked by a relationship of normative simultaneity, because in order for labor justice to be realized, all dimensions should be addressed. Contributive parity thus conveys a plural perspective: the case of work shows that any form of one-dimensionality is too narrow. Philosophers focus their analyses either on income or on recognition, either on workplace democracy or on contributive justice and meaningful work, avoiding a broader perspective – and in this way, avoiding the questions that a broader perspective enables us to see. Multidimensionality is made necessary by the nature of the normative conflicts over work crossing throughout society. Multidimensionality proves useful in integrating complementary normative needs that alone would have limited scope, beyond one-dimensional accounts.

Importantly, *the norm of contributive parity should not be seen as replacing that of autonomy*. I have shown this when discussing Paul Gomberg's contributive theory: in the absence of self-determination, contributive injustice is at risk of being fixed at the cost of freedom. Rather, the norm of contributive parity should be understood as substantiating the norm of autonomy, or even as implying it, given that it provides the basis for a substantive interpretation of autonomy for each dimension of labor justice. The economic dimension can also be seen as providing the material means for the real exercise of freedom, particularly as freedom from need; the multidimensional conception which I have argued for here allows the scope of autonomy to be broadened beyond occupational choice. The relational dimension entails autonomy insofar as it is related to the social basis of self-respect (Rawls 1971), which provides the inescapable basis for moral autonomy. The democratic dimension involves autonomy insofar as workers are the authors of the norms with which they are to comply, expanding the scope of autonomy from the "public sphere" to work, given its political nature (Ferrerias 2017; Anderson 2017). The contributive dimension is intended to provide more options to workers in defining their tasks and in managing their labor time. If autonomy has to do with choosing among a range of options, equality provides the substantive basis for those options.

To be sure, the standard of contributive parity does not provide an institutionally specific response to normative conflicts relating to contributive inequality. Rather, it should be taken as a normative standard that leaves social actors free to interpret according to the specific situation in which they leave. Recall, in fact, that as Axel Honneth has observed, the democratic dimension may have indeed some priority over the other dimensions, as *prima inter pares* (Honneth 2017)¹⁷². Even though contributive parity may appear as a vague and indeterminate norm, nonetheless it is clear that social subjects and institutions should ensure that contributive subordination and miscontribution embedded in the structures of work be

¹⁷² "The sphere of democratic action stands out among the other functionally complementary spheres of freedom; it is *prima inter pares*, because it is the only place in which problems from every corner of social life can be articulated for all ears and be presented as a task to be solved in cooperation." (Honneth 2017, 96)

considerably reduced. These actors should be left free to determine on an autonomous basis the actual strategies necessary to implement the principle.

Contributive parity, so conceived, may appear too demanding, and even utopian. Yet different levels of accomplishment of contributive parity within a society may be distinguished: i.e. affirmative and transformative (Fraser 2003)¹⁷³. Affirmative or “sufficientarian” strategies of egalitarian labor justice would require that the work conditions of the contributively worst off are improved with respect to the plural dimensions of contributive parity, by intervening on the effects rather than the structures of work relations. This would entail, for example, affirmative action strategies, minimum wage laws, and so on. Transformative egalitarian labor justice, on the other hand, would intervene on the structural causes of labor injustice, by subverting the property system, current status norms, decision-making rules, automating undesired tasks, and providing strategies of fair cooperation for tasks that are not automatable (either because it is not possible or desirable to automate them, as in the case of carework). On the whole, it would take the shape of a substantive actualization of the contributive half of the classical principle: “from each according to their capacities”.

Yet, the concept of contributive parity may appear too vague. How does it actually help to decide between competing contributive patterns? In the following paragraph I address this important question.

4.4. *Deciding Between Competing Contributive Patterns: The Principle of the Joint Dimensions*

In order to decide between competing forms of work and division of labor, one should consider the dimensions of labor justice jointly. Over the course of the discussion, I have shown that one-dimensional accounts of justice fail to address key issues at stake in labor justice. The norm of contributive parity, by contrast, is inherently multidimensional, in that it requires that all dimensions of labor justice are satisfied jointly. But what does this mean exactly?

This means that one cannot be said to contribute as a peer if she does not enjoy free occupational choice thanks to freedom from material need (*maldistribution*), if she is not treated as an equal in structures of labor (*social inequality*), if her voice does not count in the determination of her work and its framework (*powerlessness*), if she performs qualitatively and quantitatively unfair work (*miscontribution* and *contributive subordination*). As in Nancy Fraser’s perspective, these dimensions should be understood as co-essential rather than mutually exclusive. Though relatively autonomous and discrete, all of these dimensions of contributive parity should be thought of as mutually reinforcing; indeed, a sort of internal ‘mutual solidarity’ connects them.

However, still this does not help us to decide between competing contributive patterns. In order to help do so, the relationship between these dimensions should ensure that normative responses take into account the multidimensional nature of contributive parity. Call this the *principle of the joint dimensions* of labor justice. That is, when deciding between competing responses within each dimension of labor justice (economic, relational, political, contributive), preference should be given to that which helps to foster other dimensions too.

Let us see thus how this principle may be applied, by considering three examples of contributive patterns:

¹⁷³ For a more nuanced picture of the possibilities of social change see: Wright (2010).

- the hierarchical division of labor: task planners vs task executors;
- the democratic division of labor;
- the contributively egalitarian division of labor: rotation of routine tasks and freely chosen training; and
- the quantitatively fair division of labor: hard work compensated through higher doses of free time.

Dimensions of labor justice Contributive Patterns	Distributive	Relational	Political	Contributive	
				Quality	Quantity
Hierarchical Division of Labor: Task Planners vs Task Executors	/	/	/	/	/
Democratic Division of Labor	/	x	x	/	/
Contributively Egalitarian Division of Labor	/	x	/	x	/
Quantitatively Fair Division of Labor	/	Partially met	/	/	x

This table shows that some forms of the division of labor would be rejected by the principle of the joint dimensions of contributive parity. This is the case in the hierarchical division of labor between task planners and task executors. In fact, this contributive pattern does not satisfy any of the dimensions of contributive parity: it is not grounded on real free occupational choice thanks to freedom from material need; it treats some workers as inferiors; it excludes task executors from decision-making processes; and it reserves for them tasks with low quality under conditions of time heteronomy. Contributive parity, thus, is incompatible with this hierarchical contributive pattern.

Note that the norm of autonomy defended by meaningful work theories also would have allowed us to criticize this contributive pattern. Thus, it may seem that contributive parity does not add much to what we could already say about work. However, here there are far more resources for criticism. In fact, this contributive pattern is objectionable not only because workers used for task execution are not autonomous and perform routine tasks, as meaningful work theories stress, but *also* because they are not free from material need, they tend to be structurally treated as inferiors, they are excluded from decision-making processes, and they have low control over their labor time. *Contributive parity is a more demanding norm than that of "contributive autonomy"*. Similarly, perfectionist readings of meaningful work would have objected to the hierarchical division of labor by opposing the obstacles it presents to workers' flourishing. By contrast, contributive parity criticizes this contributive pattern *by treating the*

issue as a matter of justice due to all in a community of equals, not as a conception of the good, which is inherently liable to contestation.

Therefore, among alternative contributive patterns, preference should be given to the pattern that maximizes contributive parity in all the dimensions. The ideal model of contributive parity, thus, would be one in which people benefit from real free occupational choice, where wage differences are moderate, equal opportunities in access to occupations were really implemented and all would have fair access to socially produced wealth; where structures of the division of labor substantively treat all workers as equals; where the ‘voice’ of workers has a real weight in the organization, as does the voice of the communities and those affected by the activity; and where workers enjoy autonomy, complexity, and initiative as well as time autonomy. *Between a contributive pattern that satisfies only distributive or political dimensions, and one that satisfies more, one should prefer that which maximizes contributive parity in the larger number of dimensions of labor justice.*

To be sure, this way of proceeding may be extended also to normative conflicts within other dimensions – for instance, models of distributive justice. For example, in deciding between competing measures within the economic dimension – say, UBI, POD, or workfare – the principle of the joint dimensions would require us to consider what the impact of such measures would be with respect to the other dimensions. Preference would then be given to the strategy that has a positive impact on the relational, contributive, and democratic dimensions of contributive parity. With respect to the relational dimension, UBI and POD are preferable to workfare because they prevent the stigmatization of the least advantaged. Likewise, with respect to the political dimension, the distributive solution that leaves more room for democratic participation should be preferred.

One may also apply this model to decide which distributive pattern may be preferred from the perspective of contributive parity. This is a widely unaddressed issue in philosophical debates. Let us go back, thus, to Part I, the models of distributive justice observed through the lens of work. Which one among them is preferable?

Dimensions of labor justice Distributive Models	Relational	Political	Contributive	
			Quality	Quantity
Liberal-Egalitarian (POD)	x	/	/	/
Luck Egalitarian/Socialist	/	/	/	/
Allocative (UBI)	x	/	/	/
Pluralist	x	x	x	x

The principle of joint dimensions of contributive parity thus enables us to decide among competing distributive models from the perspective of labor justice. It is clear that Walzer’s

pluralist model tends to fit all of these dimensions. However, note that these models are not perfectly commensurable. POD and UBI are more or less concrete institutional realizations of distributive principles, whereas Walzer’s, Roemer’s and Rawls’ models are more abstract, normative philosophical accounts. This table should be seen as an example of possible applications of the principle of contributive parity in a variety of conflicts.

Let us consider, too, competing relational patterns from the perspective of contributive parity. I will consider here some examples taken from our previous discussion, even though the issue would require further exploration:

Dimensions of labor justice Relational Models	Distributive	Political	Contributive	
			Quality	Quantity
Recognition as Achievement	/	/	/	/
Interactional Social Equality	/	/	x	/
Structural Social Equality	x	x	x	x

Contributive parity requires that structural social equality be preferred to merely interactional social equality and to recognition as achievement. Of course, they should not necessarily be seen as conflicting. However, in case of conflict, priority should be given to structural social equality.

4.5. *Contributive Parity: A Contributive Justice Test*

Let us go back to the example of heteromated workers, which I considered in Chapter II, in order to apply a “contributive justice test” to the norm of contributive parity. In that chapter, I came to the conclusion that distributive responses to the automation of labor do not adequately account for the unequal divisions of labor involved in technological innovation. Here, the standard of contributive parity along with the principle of the joint dimensions allow us to go beyond this negative assessment, and it enables us to say that the benefits of technological innovation should satisfy a series of criteria for labor justice.

- First, the increased profits given by labor-saving devices should be enjoyed by all, so as to increase their occupational choice as well as to allow them to share in socially produced wealth.
- Second, the divisions of labor affected by technological change should not convey inequality in contributive burdens and benefits so as to treat some as inferiors.
- Third, the ends of technological innovation and its role in communities should be subject to public scrutiny, rather than being the prerogative of few capital owners.

- Finally, all should benefit from technological change so that the autonomy, complexity, personal initiative, and time autonomy involved in their tasks be maximized. This entails that, in case some tasks are still heteronomous, routine, and mindless in character, strategies to reduce contributive subordination should be realized as much as possible, also in a mixed and pluralistic way.

If all should contribute to social cooperation as peers, then it follows that crowdwork and heteromated labor are normatively problematic. Justice requires that the outsourcing chain that reserves its last links for the less advantaged social groups be subject to normative scrutiny.

The normative core of this discussion lies in the idea that all should benefit from automation in their work and not merely through changes in their income, and that the externalizing logic of automation should not fall on the shoulders of some; strategies that aim to lighten this burden ought to be implemented on a democratic basis. Contributive parity enables us to move the debate on work and automation in the direction of an egalitarian conception of labor justice. I have argued that technological change should be complemented by making labor relations fair, and not just in terms of redistributing wealth. I have discussed the shortcomings of the allocative and the desirability views with respect to a more nuanced scenario than that of the “end of work”, where work and technology co-exist and reshape one another in unequal ways. Then I argued that a conception of labor justice should consider work as an irreducible normative problem, which is distinct from income despite being deeply related to it (normative differentiation); that it should conceive of work as fundamentally embedded in socially interdependent relations instead of being confined to an individual experience (social interdependence); and that it should take work as a form of participation in social cooperation likely to have multiple and competing meanings, which need not be defined once and for all for labor justice (pragmatic pluralism). I have also considered two conceptions of labor justice that meet most of these conditions, providing the relational, democratic (Young), and contributive (Gomberg) dimensions of labor justice. These views challenge current forms of the social organization of work, which the main views on automation overlook. This causes most positions to naturalize labor injustice and to implicitly certify our normative impotence. Thus, I have highlighted the need for a more comprehensive view that includes the economic, relational, democratic, and contributive dimensions of labor justice. Beyond mere allocative equality and competing views on the inherent desirability of work, the principle of contributive parity I have advocated here allows us to criticize unequal divisions of labor, grounded in the view that all should be able to contribute to social cooperation as peers, and that technology should be seen as an ally in this pursuit. Justice requires that all benefit from technological innovations, so that the contributive autonomy of some is not pursued at the expense of that of others. Technology is neither inherently “good” nor “bad”. What matters is the political and social framework in which technology is embedded. Technology may provide opportunities to make work and the division of labor fairer, provided that these conditions are met.

4.6. *Why Is Contributive Parity Preferable To Other Normative Models of Work?*

It should be clear, now, why contributive parity is preferable to the normative models considered thus far. I will provide here a brief outline of these reasons.

Unlike the desirability models, which I have identified in meaningful work theories and post-work views, contributive parity is more demanding than a norm of autonomy, contextualizing workers' claims to autonomy within the broader context of the division of labor where some are required to pay higher contributive costs than others (social interdependence condition). Unlike the contributive justice model, it does not ground the idea of fair work on a strongly perfectionist view about how work should be experienced by individuals and its inherent meaning, but rather on the intuition that all should be put into a scenario where they are able to contribute to social cooperation as peers, regardless of the particular interpretation that each individual embraces of the meaning of work and its role in human nature (pragmatic pluralist condition). Unlike the democratic model, it integrates claims for democracy within a broader concern for redistributive, relational, and contributive justice, beyond merely deliberative concerns (multidimensionality). Each of these models, however, provide fruitful elements that can be integrated into the contributive parity standard. The multidimensional, egalitarian, pluralist and deontological standpoint that I advocate will prove better suited to addressing cases of labor injustice than the desirability, contributive, and democratic models.

Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to clarifying what it means to be equals at work, without renouncing concerns for autonomy and pluralism. Of course, establishing an equilibrium between them may be difficult to realize. Nonetheless, I hope I have convinced the reader that without concerns for equality, autonomy may be compatible with objectionable forms of the division of labor that may reproduce, in turn, other objectionable inequalities.

Work should be recognized as one of the pivotal sites of freedom and equality, not excluded from normative considerations as has been the case for a long time. The thesis has shown that, while important, redistributing goods is not sufficient for labor justice; nor is recognizing people for their unique abilities. There are norms, practices, and beliefs that need to be challenged in themselves in order for social cooperation to be fair. What is needed is a wide perspective that integrates concerns for distributive justice with concerns of relational equality, democracy and fair contribution. The idea of contributive parity may provide more resources to address the challenges of this century, which involve a changing labor market in an increasingly unequal world, than perspectives grounded in questionable ideas of the intrinsic meaning of work – which do not seem to be reconcilable with the pluralism of contemporary societies, especially when it comes to defining the role that work has for individuals. At the same time, the thesis has shown that pluralism isn't a good reason to withdraw from the project of making work fairer, as most distributive thinkers seem to have thought. Leaving work outside of the scope of justice implicitly leads to the naturalization of current structures of work, thereby permitting unacceptable levels of inequality that unjustifiably exclude most of the population from the possibility of contributing as peers. These premises could be extended to a global perspective. Structures of economy can no longer be thought of as restricted to the domestic level. A globalized economy requires a global perspective and, possibly, a global response. It may be important to stress that global labor injustice cannot be considered as a mere sub-case of global distributive injustice (see also Ronzoni 2016). Issues of global poverty – such as those investigated by Thomas Pogge – are not the only problems raised by globally unequal contributions. The global division of labor may provide a paradigmatic example of what I have called contributive inequality on a global scale, for the North and the South of the world are such not merely for distributive reasons, but also in the way they share labor. The thesis has provided some conceptual tools that may in principle be extended to a more focused consideration of global labor justice, even though this would require specifically focused, further consideration in its own right.

What shape contributive parity takes should be defined by social actors in their particular historical and geographical contexts. The norm does not function as a specific recipe that tells people and policy makers what they should do. Rather, as a philosophical norm, it provides critical guidelines and a normative orientation, which social actors may interpret according to their own particular situations and needs. Strategies to rethink the ways in which we cooperate should be realized, if we want our society to be just.

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