

Pablo Gilabert **The Socialist Principle “From Each According To Their Abilities, To Each According To Their Needs”** (Penultimate draft; forthcoming in *Journal of Social Philosophy*)

1. Introduction

This paper offers an exploration of the socialist principle “*From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.*” The Abilities/Needs Principle is arguably the ethical heart of socialism but, surprisingly, has received almost no attention by political philosophers.¹ I will propose an interpretation of the principle and argue that it involves appealing ideas of solidarity, fair reciprocity, recognition of individual differences, and meaningful work.

There is a moderate revival of interest in socialism. In the aftermath of the global crisis of 2008, many people started to wonder whether there is a desirable alternative to the capitalist way of organizing economic life. Socialism provides the historically most important counter-tradition to capitalism. But how should we understand socialism today? To answer this question, we can think of a fully developed conception of social justice as having three key dimensions. It would propose a set of normative principles (DI), certain social institutions and practices that implement those principles (DII), and some political strategies of transformation leading agents from where they are to the social realizations implementing the principles (if these do not exist already) (DIII). Now, it is common to characterize socialism (or communism, a term preferred by many Marxists) in terms of dimension DII. Socialism is seen as a form of social organization in which economic class division no longer exists and in which workers control the means of production, shape the economic process, and benefit equally from it. I think, however, that this narrow focus on DII should be avoided, and that we should make discussion of DI more prominent. We cannot defend any specific version of DII as desirable without engaging the standards that DI illuminates.² Discussion at DI is also crucial because we cannot simply assume, as many socialists did in the past, that socialist transformations are inevitable. History need not move in a

socialist direction. To move it in that direction, some political agents will have to become committed to socialism and pursue it in practice. Given the mistakes of past socialist politics, this point has real bite. Many people need to be convinced that socialism is desirable, and some also need to be convinced that socialism is not utterly undesirable. This requires ethical argument and advocacy.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 analyzes the formulation of the Abilities/Needs Principle by Marx. Section 3 identifies the principle's initial plausibility, but shows that it faces problems that cannot be addressed without developing a fresh interpretation of it. Sections 4.1-3 provide an interpretation of the principle that highlights demands concerning opportunities for self-realization in work, positive duties of solidarity, sensitivity to individual differences, and mechanisms of fair reciprocity. Although it focuses largely on DI, this paper also considers DII and DIII. Section 4.4 explores a practical implementation of the socialist principle, and section 5 discusses some normative puzzles about the transition from capitalism to socialism.

2. The Marxian platform

The Abilities/Needs Principle (hereafter "ANP") was formulated by Karl Marx in a late text, the "Critique of the Gotha Program." This is one of the few occasions in which Marx is explicit about what socialism (or communism, in his words) would involve. Although my aims in this paper are not exegetical, it will be helpful to summarize the key points in Marx's discussion.³ They are of intrinsic interest, have been quite influential in socialist thought, and will be significant for this paper's argument.

Marx presents two principles of distribution. The first is the so-called Contribution Principle (*To each according to their contribution*), and the second is the ANP (*From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs*). They are supposed to apply consecutively, in

two phases of socialism. The second is evaluatively superior to the former. In the early phase part of the distribution already caters directly for needs: the Contribution Principle is constrained by basic provisions concerning health care, education, and the reproduction of the infrastructure of the economy. But the ANP goes far beyond such basic needs, catering for the conditions for everyone's human flourishing. The ANP also interrupts the translation of inequalities in natural endowments into unequal access to consumption goods. The needs of each person count equally regardless of the extent of their capability to produce. However, the principle's implementation is not feasible during the early stage of transition, as moral and political culture is still colored by bourgeois principles (such as the principle of exchange of commodities with equivalent value—which disadvantages workers with lower natural talents), and there is not yet enough material abundance to support the higher needs of all. It thus makes sense to implement the Contribution Principle first. Although less intrinsically desirable, its implementation would ease the transition away from capitalism by delivering on its unfulfilled promise to reward productive output rather than reflect the superior bargaining power of those in superior class positions. Furthermore, it would pave the way for the creation of more desirable distributive schemes by introducing incentives to generate the level of material abundance that would make distribution according to needs viable and thus a real option.

3. Exploring the ANP

3.1. Initial appeal

I find the ANP very appealing. Here are some (related) reasons why:

(i) It involves an ideal of reciprocity. As a conjunction of requirements on economic life, the principle not only refers to the demand side (to distribution according to needs) but also to the supply side (to production according to abilities). (ii) This idea of reciprocity is constrained by

considerations of fairness. It involves similarity in effort, not equivalence of output or exchange value. If productive efforts are similar, it is fair that receipt of income and other means for need satisfaction be equal. This is important because people differ in their native abilities and social circumstances. Appealingly, the principle does not condone inequalities in capability to satisfy needs that depend on such morally arbitrary (and often unchosen) factors. Marx anticipated contemporary “luck-egalitarianism”—the view that it is unfair for some to be worse off than others through no choice or fault of their own—when he criticized distributions that “tacitly recogniz[e] unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural privileges”.⁴

(iii) The principle articulates an ideal of solidarity according to which we should produce and distribute with the needs of others (besides our own) in mind. Socialism involves positive duties to help make the life of others better, or, as Einstein’s puts it, “a sense of responsibility for [one’s] fellow men”.⁵

(iv) The principle involves a direct concern with people’s well-being. Resources are only means to access well-being, and their distribution’s significance is instrumental. (v) Relatedly, the principle is sensitive to the fact that each individual differs from others in important ways both in their abilities and needs. So identical incomes or resources will not yield equality in the relevant sense. Here Marx anticipated Sen’s challenge to resourcist views of equality as facing the “conversion problem” (the fact that, due to different personal, environmental, and cultural circumstances, people may not be able to achieve the same level of well-being even if they have identical resources).⁶

(vi) Marx’s discussion of the principle addresses feasibility considerations to judge when its application is appropriate. Thus, when not enough cultural backing or material abundance is yet in place, the implementation of the lower Contribution Principle may be preferable. This exemplifies a general, appealing feature of the socialist tradition: its seemingly paradoxical, but

in fact consistent and quite fruitful effort to develop proposals for social change that are both ethically ambitious and realistic. Socialists invite both serious normative reflection (of the kind pursued in moral and political philosophy) and consideration of practical feasibility (as revealed by political experience and social science).

(vii) Within some strands of the socialist tradition, the principle has been interpreted as working in tandem with a demand for democratic control of productive resources and with public deliberation about how to specify the economic distributions it mandates. Construed this way, the principle helps in the exploration of democracy at the level of the economy besides governmental institutions. Since people spend so much of their lives at work, it is important that they have opportunities to have a say on how their economic activities are shaped. Since inequality of economic power often translates into inequality of political power, it is also instrumentally significant to limit the former through economic democracy.

(viii) In the socialist tradition, the principle has been taken to require promotion of opportunities for self-realization through development and exercise of people's capabilities in meaningful work and other activities. This is an important good (arguably a need) often missed in other political views that only focus on income and its use in acquiring consumption goods.

(ix) The socialist view that needs ground entitlements to support by others helps challenge an extreme ideal of independence as self-reliance. That ideal is infeasible because nobody can flourish without substantial help, and it is undesirable because there is intrinsic value in mutual support.⁷ As I see it, the ANP expresses a view of people as producers and beneficiaries in inclusive society. There is no shame in getting more (to satisfy one's needs) than one produces (through using one's abilities) if one makes an appropriate effort to contribute when one can. Coupled with effective opportunities to participate and make decisions in production and politics,

the positive right to support from others involves solidarity without disrespect for people's productive capacities and autonomy.

(x) A socialist concern with access to needs fulfillment has consequences for social design. It helps explain why "pre-distributive" measures (such as egalitarian forms of property in means of production or access to training) to eliminate concentration of economic power are important but insufficient. It is important to directly focus on distribution that supports people's capability to lead flourishing lives. Furthermore, there is reason to rearrange production itself to offer producers a more cooperative and fulfilling experience.⁸ Socialism always emphasizes solidarity besides freedom and equality, both at the level of production and distribution.

3.2. Is the principle trivial, redundant, or manifestly inferior to others?

Some might ask whether it makes sense today to even entertain a view of economic justice based in the ANP. Kymlicka provides an instructive example of skepticism.⁹ He raises a number of challenges to the ANP. They can be summarized as saying that the principle may be trivial, redundant, or manifestly inferior to others. Triviality may arise if it just restates the familiar idea of equal concern for the interests of all without telling us anything specific about how to honor it. It may be redundant because we already have principles calling for equal consideration of the interests of all in liberal egalitarian theories (such as those of John Rawls or Ronald Dworkin). When we consider those theories we may find, furthermore, that the ANP is manifestly inferior to them, as it does not include insights they lack and it lacks insights they have. Two examples of the latter insights are the account of the needs or interests that matter from the point of view of justice by reference to social primary goods (Rawls) or resources (Dworkin), and the circumstance/choice distinction that helps to establish a demarcation between inequalities that

deserve to be combated from the point of view of justice (those resulting from circumstances) and those that do not (those resulting from choice).

To respond to this challenge we can say several things. First, the ANP was formulated before the recent liberal egalitarian theories that Kymlicka mentions, and Marx already captured some of the insights of those theories in his discussion of the ANP. Marx, and socialists more generally, were worried about superficial views of equality that did not address material disadvantage. They demanded economic systems that actually worked equally to the benefit of all those living under them, challenging the absolute and relative deprivations capitalist institutions generated. In this respect, part of the appeal of contemporary liberal egalitarianism consists precisely in mobilizing socialist concerns that pre-date them. Furthermore, Marx anticipated the circumstance/choice distinction. As we saw, in the “Critique of the Gotha Program” Marx criticizes the Contribution Principle precisely because it condones inequalities in the capacity to satisfy needs which result from choice-independent differences in natural endowments. Arguably, the ANP captures the liberal egalitarian concern for responsibility if we consider both of its clauses rather than only the second (as Kymlicka does). The first clause identifies a responsibility to contribute, and we can interpret the second (as I will below) as taking the justifiability of some demands on the social product as depending on one’s making an appropriate effort to support its generation.

There is more. The ANP, and the socialist tradition, provide fresh insights about how to think about the metric and duties of distributive justice. They include a rich account of “abilities” and “needs” as being multifarious, developing over time, and as partially dependent on the nature of social and political systems. They include a valuable emphasis on the significance of self-realization in work besides consumption.¹⁰ And they display a fundamental concern for solidarity (as captured, for example, in the responsibility to produce to meet the needs of others as something that has intrinsic significance).

Recent liberal egalitarian theories are different from earlier liberal views of economic equality (which focused only on formal equality of opportunity) precisely because they have absorbed the historical contribution of socialism. It is liberalism that has moved toward socialist ideas. If contemporary socialists move toward the liberal egalitarian framework, they partly move toward greater understanding of their own historical contribution. As will become clear from what follows, I accept that there are serious problems in the Marxian formulation of the ANP. I also accept that contemporary socialists have much to learn from liberalism. I think that any viable contemporary socialist view of justice must substantially overlap with liberalism, absorbing the priority the latter gives to certain civil and political freedoms. But the socialist tradition has much to offer as well. An elaboration of the ANP can yield important insights.

3.3. Need to develop an interpretation of the principle

Despite its initial plausibility, there are important worries regarding the ANP that cannot be satisfactorily addressed without developing an interpretation of it. In this subsection I briefly identify the worries and say how we might respond to them. The rest of the paper develops these responses.

(i) *Beyond justice?* Some say that when Marx depicts the future socialist society he assumes that in it there would be no serious conflict of interests or material scarcity. On this view, the ANP is not really a normative principle. It does not prescribe anything. Rather, it describes or predicts a situation beyond justice. Whether or not Marx thought this, we can entertain the ANP as a normative principle for situations in which the circumstances of justice do hold.¹¹ It may be unrealistic to expect that we will ever be placed in a situation in which serious problems of distributive justice do not arise.¹² In any case, we need principles to guide our conduct in

situations in which the problems exist. I will construe the ANP as at least in part a guide to address them.

(ii) *Appropriate metric (and issues of scarcity, disagreement, and paternalism)*. What needs should we recognize as giving rise to distributive entitlements? They must include more than very basic needs if the ANP is to involve more than basic sufficientarian demands (which it certainly does). But they cannot be equivalent to whatever people want or desire, given that scarcity remains. So we need a criterion of reasonable demands. This is difficult to provide given that people disagree about what is good, and we should beware of paternalistic impositions by political institutions. These problems are real. But it is important to notice that they affect any egalitarian view of justice. For example, advocating equality of opportunity or resources does not avoid them because we must determine which opportunities are worth guaranteeing politically, and make special provisions when equal resources yield unequal life-prospects (e.g. regarding health) for people with different native endowments. In 4.2, I recommend that we address these issues by developing a flexible yet substantive account of needs and by encouraging practices of democratic choice and public deliberation.

(iii) *Responsibility*. How should we respond to needs that are very costly to meet when those having them have chosen to act in ways that foreseeably generate them? This problem is common in egalitarian views. I will suggest that the ANP can be sensitive to issues of responsibility. Given its concern with the supply side besides the demand side, it already assumes that each must be mindful of the effects of their choices on others. However, this will be qualified by other considerations. When what is stake is access to basic goods necessary for subsistence and for participation in the political community, needs may give rise to unconstrained distributive obligations.¹³ These points are developed in 4.1-4.3.

(iv) *Incentives*. Will people be motivated to be productive in a socialist economy? Why? This is another typical worry. To address it, one could engage self-centered instrumental considerations, making it prudent for people to support a socialist economy to avoid financial losses or the negative judgment or low esteem of fellow citizens. Another strategy is to cultivate a social ethos of solidarity and engage the intrinsic significance of self-realization in productive and meaningful work.¹⁴ People could organize their working activities so that they develop and exercise their capabilities and contribute, fraternally, to the well-being of others. It is interesting to consider the possible tensions between these considerations (including, for example, possible tensions between self-realization and solidaristic service). I develop these points in 4.3, 4.4, and 5.

(v) *Matching supply and demand*. Even if the incentives problem is solved, there is the issue of how to make what is produced and what is needed coincide. In a large complex economy this poses enormous informational problems. An option is to fashion economies that retain the efficient signaling mechanisms of markets without their inegalitarian distributive consequences. I explore this strategy in 4.4.

4. Developing the ANP

4.1. The ANP is not the only principle socialists should accept

I focus here on the ANP. But a complete account of dimension DI of socialism should also include other principles, and if possible identify their relations. For example, it should include principles of civil and political liberty, and see them as often outweighing the ANP when their implications conflict. If people choose jobs in which they make poor use of their productive abilities they should not be coerced to do other work (except in emergencies¹⁵). People should obey (although they may campaign for changing) distributive arrangements generated by a legitimate democratic process even if they are unjust according to the ANP (unless the injustices

are extreme). In the interpretation I will formulate, the principle is normally constrained by some civil and political liberties.

4.2. Needs

When we develop our views about social justice we must consider what is good for the people involved. Principles of equality, freedom, and solidarity can't be given content otherwise. We face the questions, "Equality of what?" "Freedom to do or be what?" "Solidarity to help others get what?" The "what" at stake, at least in part, concerns what is good for people to do or be. Goods are crucial as metric, or currency, of principles of justice. This applies to the ANP. What needs should be recognized under this principle? Although I will not develop a full account of needs here, I will identify a general strategy that addresses three central questions concerning (i) how extensive the metric of needs should be, (ii) what kinds of items it should include, and (iii) how we might respond to worries about paternalism.

(i) *Extensiveness*. How expansive should be the metrics of needs? It could be said that distributing according to needs involves some austere threshold of sufficiency. But since we are trying to articulate the Marxian ideal, which is concerned with human flourishing, we should not think about needs in this way. The relevant contrast should not be between needs and non-urgent wants. It should be between real and non-real, merely apparent interests or goods. The ANP ranges over real interests in human flourishing. So the metric can be fairly expansive, without a fixed threshold, and such that having more is often better than having less. The Marxian view that needs and abilities do, and should, develop and increase over time speaks in favor of this interpretation.¹⁶ The focus, I suggest, should be on enabling the highest feasible level of need satisfaction that can be reasonably achieved at any given time.¹⁷

(ii) *Needs, capabilities, and self-realization*. A fruitful strategy for identifying the relevant needs,

in a certain context, is to focus on certain valuable capabilities of agents in that context. The needs would be constituted by what the agents require to develop and exercise those capabilities. The more the agents develop and exercise those capabilities, the more they can be said to achieve a flourishing life. A generalized version of this strategy has been recently provided by the capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.¹⁸ I think that this approach is helpful for articulating the ANP.

We can account for people's needs by considering what would constitute their capabilities to engage in certain valuable "functionings" (i.e. certain ways of being or doing they have reason to value). Marx's view of socialism as securing the conditions for people's self-realization, itself construed as the development and exercise of various capabilities, can indeed be seen as a case of the capability strategy. In particular, the emphasis on autonomous and cooperative capability development and exercise at the workplace is a distinctive contribution of the socialist tradition to the capability metric.¹⁹

There are two kinds of work in Marx's view: work that merely secures subsistence and work that involves the extensive development and expression of workers' various capabilities. The second is the kind of work that includes self-realization. It involves activities in which workers cooperate with each other as equals, have powers to choose what to do and how to do it, and develop and exercise skills through interesting, challenging, and enjoyable performances. It is the opposite of alienated labor, which involves dull or distressful tasks and servile or hostile relationships.²⁰ Now, these two kinds of work are respectively picked out in two common interpretations of the significance of work in Marx's view of socialism, the "higher form of society ... in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle".²¹ One interpretation draws on Marx's contrast between the "realm of freedom" and the "realm of necessity," which seems to locate all work in the latter, and envisions self-

realization as occurring outside of it.²² The other invokes Marx's characterization of work as "life's prime want".²³ Here self-realization in work is a primary achievement of socialism.

Arguably both forms of work are important, although in different ways. Access to work involving self-realization should count as one of the needs satisfied in socialism. As described in the previous paragraph, it strikes me as an intrinsically significant good. If the design of a just society is to focus not only on distributing the outputs of an economic process but also on its internal shape, it should have room for work of this kind. On the other hand, a duty to do one's fair share regarding some forms of instrumentally necessary but not intrinsically desirable work is obviously part of what a duty to contribute according to one's abilities should include.

Of course, there are needs that go beyond work. Needs regarding consumption goods and the pursuit of intimate relationships are clear examples. When it comes to those Marx's framework is often limited, and we must look elsewhere.²⁴ Recent work in the capability approach provides excellent ideas concerning what further categories of needs and associated capabilities we should explore.²⁵

The capability approach emphasizes various dimensions of freedom. It recommends that we foster people's positive freedom to develop and exercise various capabilities.²⁶ Second, it commands respect for people's choices by not forcing them to engage in any specific functionings. Finally, it gives especial importance to political liberties (such as voting, organizing, protesting, deliberating) that enable people to identify, try, contest, and revise political accounts of important capabilities and distributive schemes supporting them. I want to stress the limits, and importance, of this last point.

In a deliberative democracy, people can reasonably develop and revise their own views of what needs should be socially supported. But we should not conflate democratic procedures of choice and substantive criteria about what needs deserve to be supported. Thus, for example,

Geras considers the problem of identifying a “standard of reasonableness” of needs (given that we should avoid accounts that are too minimal—they are undesirable—and too maximal—they are infeasible).²⁷ He entertains three options: unilateral imposition by a state-type body, a standard that emerges spontaneously without reflection, and social norms agents come to agree upon. He says, plausibly, that the third option is the best. But notice that his discussion moved from substantive to procedural issues. Some might say that we should adopt a constructivist view here and think that how distributive schemes are chosen provides the conditions that make them right. I find this suggestion intuitively problematic because it is liable to a version of the powerful Euthyphro question: Is a distributive decision right because we make it, or should we make it because it is right? And, independently of the truth or falsity of constructivism, procedural principles do not provide substantive guidance as we try to think lucidly about what to propose, criticize, and agree to in a public debate about needs if we join it.

The questions “What is the politically legitimate procedure for deciding what needs will be met?” and “What are the correct entitlements of need?” are different. The reference to democratic liberties answers the first question without necessarily settling the second. Despite this limitation, we should recognize the great importance of democratic liberties for the implementation of the ANP. First, these liberties are intrinsically valuable: their recognition involves respect for people’s capabilities for political judgment and self-determination. Second, their use is instrumentally significant: people can enhance their knowledge about what needs are important by testing and correcting their political beliefs in public debate. Third, they are also instrumentally valuable by enabling people to keep accountable others whose political choices affect their needs. Thus, even if the standard of reasonable needs is independent, democratic liberties are important for discovering and applying its contents in autonomous, reliable, and effective ways. This is why we have a strong pro tanto reason to organize the implementation of

the ANP so that we support the needs recognized through democratic processes of debate and decision-making.

(iii) *Paternalism*. Since the ANP is meant to track capabilities for human flourishing, it clearly goes beyond anything like basic needs, and we can say that it concerns important interests more generally. But wouldn't social policy centered on some interpretation of these interests be unconscionably paternalistic?

There are two immediate and important responses to this worry. The first is that, as we saw, the application of the ANP is to proceed within a framework of democratic deliberation and choice. The presence of this framework limits the extent to which agents are subject to standards they do not themselves accept. They may, of course, be part of a minority. But the second response addresses this case. The distributive focus is on securing certain *real opportunities* or *capabilities*, not their exercise. Everybody has a civil liberty against being forced to engage in a specific functioning judged good by others when they prefer not to do so.²⁸

It might be objected that in a social scheme implementing the ANP people's liberty is unduly limited because the generation of the selected opportunities is costly, and everyone is made to pay for it whether they use them or not. However, the imposition is justified if all feasible social schemes have consequences in terms of promoting and limiting opportunities. If our normative assessment of schemes is sensitive to consequences on people's opportunities to live flourishing lives (as it should), and different feasible schemes promote different opportunity profiles, then we should (other things being equal) support the scheme with the best feasible consequences overall. It may include some opportunities that not everyone uses. But their presence is important to those who do use them, and it enhances the effective freedom of those who don't by offering them real options to choose from. Furthermore, and to repeat, the scheme would be constrained by strong

civil and political liberties which entitle people to refrain from using, and empower them to challenge and change, existing opportunity profiles.

Some might suggest that we deflate anxiety about paternalism by adopting a less controversial, sufficientarian reading of the ANP according to which we should empower people to meet their most urgent, or basic needs. But why not embrace a more ambitious ideal that targets equal opportunities to the highest levels of well-being that are reasonably feasible? After all, is it not unfair that some people can flourish less than others through no choice or fault of their own? If we secure civil and political liberties, why not pursue the more ambitious project? The remainder of this section develops this project further.

4.3. The demands of the ANP

In this subsection I propose an interpretation of the demands of the ANP. I also explore how it relates to important socialist concerns about alienation and exploitation, and helps respond to worries regarding individuals' responsibility and their different personal needs and choices concerning self-realization, consumption, and leisure.

Regarding the first task, I suggest that we understand the ANP as involving a set of demands on the organization of a system of economic cooperation. Its point is to call for an organization of economic activity that is egalitarian, solidaristic, and sensitive to difference. The organization is egalitarian because in it everyone's level of burden and benefit matters equally. It is solidaristic because with it agents express their commitment to taking each person's capacity to flourish as an end. And it is sensitive to difference because it enables people to pursue their well-being in ways that are appropriate given their own singular characteristics. These demands, combined, should shape the economic system. *Both* parts of the principle (from each according to their abilities, to

each according to their needs) should be simultaneously operative. What are the demands? At least the following five are crucial:

(a) *Opportunities for self-realization in work*: There should be effective opportunities for productive activity that involves self-realization rather than alienation. Workers should be free to choose whether they take one of them, and which one. The available activities would foster the development and actualization of workers' productive capabilities, give them powers of management, and enable them to cooperate with other workers. These opportunities would be effective in that mechanisms would be in place to offset morally arbitrary differences between workers that affect their accessibility. For example, excellent education and training would be available to all, and the workplace would be designed so that workers with different talents and bodily restrictions can thrive. These opportunities for activity involving self-realization would meet a human need to engage in it.

(b) *Positive duties*: There should be a social ethos and institutions articulating positive duties to produce to meet other people's needs. Each should envisage some reasonable level of development and use of their powers to produce in this way.

(c) *Securing basic needs*: Some instantiations of the positive duties mentioned in (b) which concern the satisfaction of basic needs for subsistence and for being able to function as a political equal have especial urgency, and should be given great weight.

(d) *Fair reciprocity*: There should be an ethos and a scheme of distribution of access to consumption goods that recognizes a responsibility to cooperate in production on terms of fair reciprocity. Nobody should take advantage of cooperative efforts of others without making their own, similar effort if they can. Similar effort is not equivalence in output (which might depend on morally arbitrary differences in native endowments), but a matter of the proportion of

contribution given one's abilities.²⁹ Those (but only those) who make an equal effort (when they can) should have equal access to consumption goods.

(e) *Sensitivity to individual differences*: Individual differences in abilities and needs are normatively important. The assessment of levels of contribution should be mindful of differences in ability. And people should be able to pursue their well-being in ways that are appropriate given their own singular characteristics. For example, they should be able to make their own choices concerning self-realization, consumption, and leisure.

I add two further components to this proposal, which qualify the foregoing demands:

(f) *Limited ideal*: The demands mentioned in (a)-(e) are limited. It is not expected that people's productive contribution will be maximal, that all their important human abilities will be developed and actualized in production, that all of their needs will be fully met, or that every important individual difference will be honored. The requirement is, in each case, to achieve an arrangement that is feasible and reasonable (i.e. one whose requirements can be met and do not involve unjustifiable sacrifices—given individuals' personal prerogative to cater for their own needs—when compared to the feasible alternatives).

(g) *Democratic control*: The design of the basic outlines of the economic system (such as the control of means of production, the coordination between productive units, the existence and rules of markets, and the schemes of taxation and subsidies) should be subject to authorization, contestation, and change by all the members of society through democratic mechanisms of opinion- and will-formation.

As I said in 4.1, the goal of framing an economic system so that it fulfills the ANP should be weighed against other normative pro tanto considerations that will often be stronger, such as the protection of civil and political rights and their fair value. My formulation of the demands associated with the principle incorporates aspects of those liberties, such as the freedom from

forced labor in (a) and certain democratic political rights affecting the design of economic institutions and practices in (g). Notice also that the sufficientarian principle of support for the provision of certain basic needs (health care, education, etc.) that are necessary for subsistence and effective citizenship is included in component (c). These considerations could also be seen as separate requirements that weigh against a more narrow formulation of the demands of the ANP.

Conceived in this way, the ANP captures the typically socialist normative concerns for need-satisfaction, non-alienation and non-exploitation. The first two concerns are captured in the shaping of the productive process as including effective opportunities for self-realization in work and the duty to help produce objects that can be used to meet needs. The concern for non-exploitation is partly captured by the standard of fair reciprocity. I will elaborate these points by suggesting that their articulation avoids pitfalls in other interpretations of the ideas captured.

First, consider non-exploitation of workers. Component (d) captures the relational wrong of taking advantage of the efforts of others without appropriate reciprocation. This contrasts with a libertarian construal of exploitation, and with a view that sees its significance as derivative from the distribution of economic assets. The former sees the wrongness of exploitation as a matter of depriving workers of the product of their labor (to which they are entitled). The latter sees it as a symptom of the unjust inequality in control of means of production, which gives capitalists more bargaining power than workers.

The principle of entitlement to the product of one's labor is problematic because it makes it unjust to impose the redistribution of some of it to meet the basic needs of those who cannot work. It thus violates component (c) of the account, which for example requires the provision of basic resources to those who cannot work because they are infirm. The principle also prohibits redistribution to those who work but are (because of having less natural talent) less productive despite exerting similar effort. We should then seek to construe the wrongness of exploitation in a

different way.³⁰ The proposal presented here can help. An intuition that seems to support the entitlement principle is that when workers have made an effort and bore costs to produce something, they have a prima facie claim to commensurate rewards.³¹ The force of this intuition can be captured by the requirement of fair response to the efforts of others in (d). The crucial idea behind the condemnation of exploitation is that there is a duty to avoid taking unfair advantage of others. In my interpretation, the ANP encodes an ideal of non-exploitation: we should not take advantage of need satisfying activities by others that benefit us without doing our share in producing advantages that can meet needs of others when we can. If we can do our share and we don't, and we receive from others who do their share, then we exploit them. (d) is an ideal of reciprocity in cooperation, according to which everyone should put corresponding levels of effort if they can when they benefit from the effort of others. Furthermore, since the proposed account includes (b) and (c), it also makes reference to positive duties to support others, which provides a key consideration missing in, and threatened by, the libertarian view. Notice that (b) and (c) need not conflict with (d): the needy that cannot work and are helped do not engage in unfair advantage-taking. A conflict may arise, however, if some make claims on the work of others without working when they can. I address this case below.

The second view of exploitation mentioned above captures the important points that unequal control of means of production affects bargaining power, and is in any case unfair given that nobody should start their life as economic agents with fewer external productive assets than others. Now notice, first, that we can take the ANP to generate this judgment given its egalitarian profile as described in the second paragraph of this subsection. Alternatively, of course, we could see it as a theorem of an independent, "luck-egalitarian" principle. Furthermore, the issues could partly be handled through the democratic process envisioned in (g). Such process could yield

collective control of means of production, or severe restrictions on private control to shape bargaining conditions appropriately.

Second, the view under discussion misses the specific *relational wrong* involved in exploitation. Initial inequality of resources enables this wrongdoing, but does not fully account for what constitutes it. The account of positive duties and fair reciprocity proposed here can partly explain what is missing. The problem with the exploitation of workers by capitalists, for example, is not only that their initial unequal access to means of production is unfair. There is also the problem that some (the capitalists) use their superior bargaining power to get others (the workers) to benefit them disproportionately, instead of creating cooperative ventures that equally support all those who make similar efforts within them. The proposal advanced here also partly explains the possible wrongs involved in relations between people who start with, or currently have, equal access to means of production. Their differences in natural endowments (intelligence, vigor, charisma, creativity, etc.) may by themselves make their bargaining power unequal, and this inequality may enable the better endowed to shape economic interactions so that they gain disproportionately from them. Outcomes of this sort involve some agents taking unfair advantage of the relative weakness of others. A social ethos and institutions of solidarity and fair reciprocity of the kind envisaged in (b) and (d) would require that they be avoided.³²

Let me add a final comment regarding component (d). As I interpret the ANP, it does not involve a complete severing of the link between work and distributive entitlements.³³ That severance might make sense if we assume lack of material scarcity or ignore that goods for consumption are the result of productive efforts by people. As long as there is scarcity, some things that people need will not be readily available. If workers have freedom of occupation (as they should), and they can be more or less productive, then certain needs can be more or less satisfied depending on how much people choose to work. In this context, it seems problematic

when a person makes claims on scarce consumption goods without having contributed to the economic process by using their abilities. The problem would be one of fairness toward those who have contributed but will receive less because of the lower economic input resulting from others' lack of contribution.³⁴

This conditionality does not make the ANP a version of the Contribution Principle, however. In circumstances of scarcity, the former, like the latter, is sensitive to contributive efforts.³⁵ But components (e), (b), and (a) make the ANP a different principle. Thus, it recommends that we take individual differences into account when we appraise contribution and needs. Furthermore, labor-contribution is not the ground of the duty to expand others' access to consumption goods, but a condition on generalized support in circumstances of relative scarcity. Needs are still what primarily gives rise to economic duties.³⁶ Finally, of course, in my interpretation the ANP involves a distinctive concern with self-realization, to which I now turn.

The ideal of self-realization (or non-alienation) is obviously catered for by component (a) of the proposal presented here. The socialist view that economic systems should incorporate opportunities for self-realization in work has been subject to challenge, however. Some have argued that a conception of justice appealing to self-realization in work might arbitrarily disregard other goods or preferences concerning consumption, leisure, or the cultivation of personal relationships.³⁷ Why not let people work less if this gives them more time to devote themselves to leisure and personal relationships, or work in ways that do not involve self-realization if this gives them more income for consumption? This is an important challenge. But the view presented here can answer it.

First, it is important to note that where there are time constraints, material scarcity, and multiple desiderata, *any* economic system will force people to make tradeoffs between various goods. So the issue is what system offers the best balance overall, and whether it gives people

real options and conditions of autonomy to choose from them. Capitalist societies fail badly in these respects. Economic necessity forces many people to work long hours in unsatisfying jobs for low salaries. Second, as presented in (a), work involving self-realization is an opportunity, not an obligation. Other forms of work are not banned. What is crucial is that workers are treated fairly by being given real alternatives to unfulfilling work. Third, even including opportunities for self-realization, the length of standard full-time work can be reduced. As per (g), citizens shaping the rules of their economic system can impose that reduction to free up time for other activities. Fourth, self-realization can also be pursued outside of productive work. Affirming the ANP does not require denying the importance of those other goods, or blocking their pursuit. Finally, given its component (e) demanding proper responses to individual differences, this proposal would support personal prerogatives for people to judge how to balance the multiple opportunities and obligations they face. As acknowledged in (f), the desideratum of self-realization is limited.³⁸

Still, production has a central significance as a general enabler of pretty much every activity. In any economy that is not fully automated, work will have to occur if subsistence and opportunities for human flourishing (inside and outside the workplace) are to be extensive. Any society will have to encourage through various mechanisms that people work. It is only sensible that societies accompany this demand with policies that shape a significant number of opportunities to work in ways that enable self-realization.³⁹

4.4. Implementing the ANP

I have been developing an interpretation of the ANP that addresses the puzzles identified in 3.3. My discussion has proceeded at a fairly abstract level to focus on dimension DI of the socialist ideal. Of course, much more should be said, but I hope I have showed that the principle is worth

taking seriously. But what about dimensions DII and DIII? I will tackle DIII in section 5. In the remainder of this section, I will address DII by refining what to my knowledge is the only detailed proposal of an economic system that implements the ANP. I will identify the main points in Joseph Carens's proposal⁴⁰ and then suggest some amendments.

(i) *Aims*. Carens seeks a way to make equality compatible with freedom and efficiency. His proposed implementation of the ANP achieve this by mobilizing the freedom of choice and the informational virtues of markets without the motivational and distributive features they display in capitalist societies. By doing this, Carens addresses several of the problems mentioned in 3.3, including, notably, those concerning incentives and the matching of production and demand.

(ii) *Full implementation*. Carens proposes implementations of both parts of the ANP. The “for each according to need” part is implemented via two requirements: equal post-tax income for all and direct provision targeting “differentially incurred needs” (such as special health care needs). The “from each according to ability” part is implemented via requiring from each person who can work (and only from them) that they take a full-time job and make good use of their talents in it. People are free to choose whether, where, and how much to work. They are not legally coerced to work. There is, however, a social expectation, a recognized social duty, that they work full-time and choose lines of work that are socially beneficial. People are not expected to choose jobs that maximize their level of contribution.⁴¹ They have a personal prerogative such that they may choose not to take up jobs they hate. It is up to them to strike an appropriate balance between their social duty and other considerations that are important to them.

(iii) *Social ethos*. An economy that implements the principle is efficient because in it there is a strong social ethos such that people voluntarily choose to fulfill their social duty. It includes markets as we know them insofar as different pre-tax incomes vary signaling the extent of social demand for different economic activities. But the distributive function of markets disappears, as

after-tax income is the same for all. People use these signals to identify where to contribute with their ability. By doing it even if they will not get more after-tax income than others they enact their ethical choice to fulfill the social duty to produce to equally support the needs of all. The incentive for people to work hard is moral, not pecuniary. People develop this strong sense of solidarity through socialization and through experiencing the benefits of living in a socialist society that affirms the equal importance of everyone's well-being.

(iv) *Fairness and freedom.* Finally, Carens addresses possible complaints about how this proposal honors ideals of fairness and freedom. Regarding fairness, he says that the socialist principle draws on an intuitively appealing idea of sharing the burdens of cooperation in proportion to our abilities (all should do their part, but the part each should do depends on what they can do, so that, for example, if we are moving stones from one place to another, if you are stronger than me you should carry heavier ones). He considers the worry that his approach is insensitive to the need to offer compensation to those whose work imposes greater hardships, or prefer to work less and devote themselves more to leisure, or prefer to work longer for a higher income to consume more. Carens recognizes that his proposal does not necessarily yield exactly equal access to conditions of well-being for all. But he retorts that in practice we cannot find a generally agreed upon and reliable way to balance all these considerations. Central planning systems and capitalist market economies would likely do worse. For example, the former would be seriously deficient at tracking demand, and in the latter higher salaries would often track relative scarcity of certain talents, not burdensomeness of the work done. Although he acknowledges that his scheme is not perfect, Carens says that all things considered it is “the best we can do.”

Regarding freedom, Carens considers the complaint that the social duty to produce according to ability is too demanding, leaving people too little room for doing what they want without facing social pressure. In response, he says that overall effective freedom is in fact comparatively

maximized in his socialist economy. In a capitalist economy many people have fewer consumption options outside of work (given their lower income). His proposal does not force anyone to work, and it recognizes a personal prerogative so that people are morally entitled to choose jobs they enjoy rather than hate. This option is not always really available in capitalist economies, where people are forced by circumstances to take jobs they hate to pay for food and housing and other basic necessities. The socialist ethos would not be too confining. Furthermore, we should not think that other systems, including capitalism, do not secrete constraining social expectations of their own.

Carens's impressive proposal provides the best starting point to explore the implementation of the ANP. In what follows, I introduce some critical comments and propose some amendments.

(i) *Principles and implementation.* Carens sometimes confuses the dimensions of principles (DI) and of implementation through specific institutions and practices (DII). For example, to say that it is difficult to find a publicly shared and reliable way to identify what is important for different people in terms of their relative packages of work satisfaction, consumption, and leisure may be a reason not to mention specific packages in the institutional implementation of a principle of distribution according to need, but is not itself an objection to seeing that principle as sensitive to these interpersonal variations. Other things being equal, if (and to the extent that) we could track those variations in an appropriate way, then surely we *should* introduce schemes that offer the right combination to each person.

(ii) *Fairness in tracking diverse evaluations of work, consumption, and leisure.* At the level of implementation of the demand to cater equally for the needs of all, we can add to the two policies proposed by Carens (equal post-tax income for all and direct public provision regarding differentially incurred needs). I suggest three additions. First, since people are expected to spend a lot of time working, we may shape some workplaces so that those who care about having

managerial power and self-realization in work have opportunities to enjoy them.⁴² Second, since some people may especially value leisure, or consumption, more than others, we could organize the economic system so that to accrue a certain set level of equal income people have to work a certain number of hours (the standard full-time workload). Those who want to have access to more money to consume more can work longer hours and get a higher salary, and those who want more leisure can work fewer hours and get a lower salary. The social ethos can be shaped so that people have a duty to work, should work full-time if they want equal salaries at the set level, but are free to work more if they want to consume more or less if they want more leisure. With these clear guidelines, everyone could see the scheme as fair. These modifications help service demands articulated in 4.3. They provide cases in which, through exercise of the democratic control envisaged in component (g), we can affirm positive duties to cater for the needs of all (component b), provide opportunities for self-realization in work (component a), and recognize diverse needs concerning work, leisure, and consumption (component e).⁴³

A third amendment conflicts with a feature of Carens's view as formulated in *Equality, Moral Incentives and the Market*.⁴⁴ Carens does not take an individual's access to their equal income share to be legally (as different from ethically) conditional upon their actually working (full-time or at all). This of course gives rise to the objection that the Carensian scheme would unravel due to free-riding tendencies. Carens responds that it is unlikely that many people would choose not to work, or work very little, because of the social pressure they would suffer from others, and their own sense of shame and guilt. I don't know if this speculative prediction is justified. But in any case it does not seem wrong, when the problem of free-riding is real, to introduce legal conditionality in the system.⁴⁵ Two further points would make this amendment stronger by linking it to other desiderata mentioned above. First, the equal income rule could be made not only conditional upon people working but also sensitive to the number of hours worked, to allow

work schedules that go above or below the standard full-time one (as discussed in the previous paragraph). So equality remains in that all those working the same number of hours would get the same income, but different egalitarian profiles could arise reflecting people's free choice to work more or less. This would give people the opportunity to fulfill different preferences regarding leisure and consumption while retaining the egalitarian spirit of the proposal. It would also service the concern for reciprocity which free-riding violates. Thus amended, the Carensian scheme can better service components (b), (d), and (e) of the interpretation of the ANP proposed in 4.3. A second point should be added to avoid outcomes that are too onerous, and thus to cater for component (c). Everyone, regardless of whether they work or how much they work, would have access to a basic level of income and services. This would secure everyone's basic needs and general conditions of citizenship.⁴⁶

(iii) *Role of government.* I share Carens's rejection of a centrally planned economy, and his skepticism about government bureaucrats being able to make accurate fine-grained assessments of diverse people's needs. But we should not exaggerate.⁴⁷ Even in Carens's scheme, the government has to make controversial decisions about what are the "differentially incurred needs" that are to be serviced directly, and what to do to respond to them. It also has to determine the length of a standard workload (how many hours a worker has to work to qualify as working "full-time" and thus be morally entitled to receive equal post-tax income). This is bound to be controversial too, and it already involves evaluative tradeoffs concerning the value of consumption and leisure, for example. Carens acknowledges that there would be controversial choices here, but says that they would be subject to democratic debate and choice. Now, the same can be said about the policies I suggest. They do not involve a fully centrally planned economy. They recognize that government has a role in securing a fair, level playing field for workers

without imposing a narrow (and harmful) focus on income and consumption, as Carens's regime ends up in fact having. And they are framed by democratic procedures (as per (g)).

Even if we have a reasonable picture of what would render the implementation of the ANP workable and stable, we still have to explore how such an implementation might be feasible in terms of accessibility.⁴⁸ I now turn to this issue.

5. Transition

We considered how socialism could be construed at dimensions DI and DII by entertaining an interpretation of the ANP and an amended version of the Carensian implementation. But how can we move from here to there? How is a socialist economy realizing the ANP accessible from the current capitalist one? This is the question of transition pertaining to DIII. It gives rise to many issues about the relation between feasibility and justice in general,⁴⁹ and about the achievability of socialism in particular.⁵⁰ In this section I concentrate on the specific issue of how the current capitalist ethos could be transformed into the socialist one oriented by the ANP. An immediate answer is that people can become motivated to honor that principle by being socialized in families, schools, and economic institutions that subject them to expectations based in it. This answer is helpful, but does not go far enough. We have to figure out how a generation of people may arise that choose to socialize new generations in this way for the first time.

As we saw (in section 2), Marx did not propose the ANP as the immediate target for social reorganization. Instead, he suggested that we start by implementing the Contribution Principle (hereafter "CP"). The latter generates an incentive centered on self-advancement, and does not (beyond provision for basic needs) incorporate a wide positive duty to produce to meet the needs of others who cannot produce as much as oneself. Marx had thus a two-stage view of socialist transition. Is a view like this plausible? I will advance three reflections. The first two introduce

puzzles concerning the two-stage structure of transition. I do not fully solve them, but I articulate considerations that are fruitful to address them. My last reflection is more positive. It suggests that we deploy the powerful idea of human dignity to increase the ANP's motivational traction.

(i) *Immediate vs. deferred approximation.* The first puzzle concerns the issue whether the CP and the ANP work as maximal approximations of the same key ideals in different contexts or as a teleologically articulated sequence where only the final stage enacts the ideals. On the first interpretation, the CP is as far as we can go in the early stage of socialism, and the ANP states how far we can go later on (which is a lot further, arguably all the way). There are some underlying ideals (concerning well-being, self-realization, freedom, equality, solidarity, etc.) that are common. Each principle identifies the contextually maximal approximation that is feasible in each phase.

On the second interpretation, the CP is not implemented because it provides the maximal approximation immediately available, but because it helps (1) complete the transition away from capitalism and (2) create the conditions for the introduction of the higher phase of socialism. It is only in the latter that a real approximation to the ideals occurs. In the early phase, what is crucial is (1) and (2). First, we ensure that we leave capitalism behind. This is done by finally fulfilling a key promise which capitalism makes but violates. Capitalism is often justified through the ideal of exchange of equivalents, but in it workers give more than they get, and capitalists get more than they give. By contrast, in the early phase of socialism framed by the CP, each gets in proportion to what they give. This pattern would motivate those who endorse the ideal of exchange of equivalents to move from capitalism to the early phase of socialism, and to not to go back. Second, the fulfillment of the CP gives people a strong incentive to work (as they would be rewarded in proportion to how much they work). They would thus create the great material abundance that is necessary for the socialist ideals to be really approximated in the higher phase.

The two interpretations motivate an interesting general puzzle for sequential pictures of transformation in which different principles are recommended for different stages. They involve two different rationales for selecting principles in the first stage of the two-stage sequence. The interesting issue arises because the two rationales may conflict. It could be that if we follow the first rationale (and maximize approximation to the constant ideals in each stage), then we might choose social realizations that are not optimal for enabling the following stage in the sequence. Path-dependence could set in, with a local maximum that does not lead to the global maximum.⁵¹ People socialized in the value of exchange of equivalents may not want to move to a society in which that principle is dropped. There is then the option of going for the second rationale (and choose what would maximize the chances of eventually moving to the situation in which the constant ideals could find their maximal approximation overall). But then there is the moral problem of choosing social organizations for the first stage that are harmful to people, or not as good as they could be at the time. The worse the situation in the early phase of transition, the worse (other things equal) this strategy is. Things get even more problematic when the calculation of what is necessary or most likely to produce the conditions for the higher phase is uncertain. Why take the step backward when it is not certain that this would enable us to take the envisioned two steps forward? The more uncertainty, the worse (other things being equal) this strategy is. These problems would be mitigated (but not dissolved) if people apply these strategies through their own democratic choice.

(ii) *Inclusion vs. contradiction*. Another puzzle when determining how to proceed regarding the two stages is this. We have to consider two possible valences of the first stage in relation to the second: (1) the first involves a less extensive realization of the relevant ideals than the second (*inclusion*); (2) the first violates the ideals realized in the second (*contradiction*). The early stage of socialism, by comparison to the higher stage, exemplifies both (1) and (2). The

implementation of the CP is accompanied with the requirement that basic needs be met, and it increases overall resources available to expand people's well-being beyond basic needs. This is a case of (1). It could be said that to implement the CP is to partially implement the ANP: distribution according to contribution gives people part of what they need, and the part of it that they can feasibly get in the early stage of transition. But it condones inequalities of access to means of consumption (and well-being more generally) that result from morally arbitrary differences (such as differences in native endowments and in social circumstances).⁵² This is a case of (2).

It could be asked: Since the implementation of the CP involves a case of (2), why not adopt another transitional principle? For example, Jon Elster suggests that a better pragmatic choice in the early stage is some version of Rawls's Difference Principle (which accepts only those inequalities that work to the maximum benefit of the worst-off—or, in a weaker version, make the worst-off better off).⁵³ Elster might be right, but we should not ignore the problem of feasibility that Marx is addressing. As we saw, the CP involves some continuity with the bourgeois moral culture that is being targeted for transformation (the principle of exchange of equivalents is consistently applied), whereas the Difference Principle seems more remote. In fact, Rawls himself acknowledges that it is quite a radical departure from the status quo.⁵⁴ If this is true, then it might be a good idea to explore a *three-stage* schedule of principles: the CP, the Difference Principle, and the ANP. The second would be introduced as the inequalities in access to consumption goods resulting from morally arbitrary differences in productive capacity condoned by the first become ethically and politically salient, and the third would be introduced once the incentive problems that the second addresses become less pressing. As material scarcity is reduced, these changes in moral culture might succeed.

It is important that in its weak version the Difference Principle is not the final destination. It involves a relatively weak version of fraternity. Rawls thinks it expresses fraternity as “the idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of others who are less well off”.⁵⁵ But we can envisage a stronger form of fraternity that involves more than consoling the worse off by enabling them to have more than they had before we came to have more than we had before. We can also wonder whether we should want to have more than them (rather than share the new advantages we can help bring about, equally, with them) to begin with. The ANP involves a more exigent, and egalitarian form of solidarity. (It is interesting, however, to consider how it compares with the strong version of the Difference Principle, which calls for maximization of the condition of the worst-off but does not require equality.)

Interestingly, Rawls himself considers whether Marx could have adopted the Difference Principle instead of the CP, but judges that he would have rejected it because of his left-libertarian commitments. Those commitments require equality of access to external productive resources, but beyond that they prohibit involuntary transfers from more to less advantaged producers. The Difference Principle would coercively impose such redistributions.⁵⁶ I think that Rawls’s interpretation is defective. There may be a left-libertarian strand in Marx, but it is absent in the “Critique of the Gotha Program.” In this text, the CP is accompanied by requirements to provide health care and education for all and support for those who cannot work. Marx says that those services will expand as the socialist transition deepens. These redistributions involve enforceable positive duties to help others. They are incompatible with libertarianism.

(iii) *Human dignity and the move from exchange of equivalents to mutual affirmation.*⁵⁷ The inspiring idea of human dignity is central to (at least) modern moral and political culture. Its core is that human beings are owed forms of respect and concern that show proper appreciation of their valuable capacities. As agents capable of sentience, theoretical and practical reasoning,

aesthetic appreciation, creative labor, and social cooperation (amongst other basic capacities), human beings should be granted rights to what they need to develop and exercise these capacities in their social life. Human rights identify the most urgent claims of human dignity.⁵⁸ Social justice, including economic justice, goes further, recognizing that human dignity gives rise to equal entitlements to the conditions for leading a flourishing life, not only a decent one.

Acting on the ANP involves a double affirmation of producers and receivers of products. Receivers are affirmed because their consumption-needs are seen as intrinsically significant: it is worth working to meet them. Producers are also affirmed, as production makes available activities in which their capabilities for self-direction and for cooperative and creative labor are developed and exercised. When multiple agents honor the principle in their economic relations, the double affirmation is reciprocal and general.⁵⁹ An economy becomes a system of mutual affirmation in which each participant's well-being and autonomy are equally significant. In this economy, the human dignity of each is respected, as the free pursuit of well-being of each in production and consumption is protected. In addition, human dignity is seen as giving rise to positive duties of solidaristic support. To show concern besides respect for the human dignity of others we must help promote, not just refrain from hampering, the conditions in which they can flourish. Socialism takes the abilities and needs of all as the focus of negative *and* positive duties. As a result, it gives human dignity full recognition.

The socialist outlook of mutual affirmation, involving both negative and positive duties, goes beyond the ethos of capitalism, which involves widespread selfishness. In capitalist economic life, the needs of others are normally relevant for me only if, and to the extent that, catering for them would work to my own advantage. This attitude does not take the dignity of other human beings seriously. The idea of exchange of equivalents is also problematically self-centered. Why should we think that individuals are not entitled to objects whose exchange value is higher than

the exchange value of the objects they themselves produce? This ignores the intrinsic significance of their needs, and the mutual affirmation that solidarity embodies. The idea of exchange of equivalents gets whatever appeal it has from its association to the idea of fair reciprocity. But fair reciprocity is an altogether different idea, which is captured by the ANP. It requires mutuality in productive effort we are able to exert, not that only identical exchange values be swapped.

The socialist Abilities/Needs Principle gives human dignity its due. However, this point is obscured by a common, ideological construal of human dignity. On that construal, getting support from others is a source of humiliation or shame, and giving it involves arrogance or guilt. This is an ideological outlook because it twists the idea of dignity to reproduce existing relations of inequality, exploitation, and indifference. Once we move beyond conditions of severe scarcity, the injustice of these relations cannot be ignored, and the inspiring call for the mutual affirmation of our human dignity may finally gain the motivational traction it deserves.⁶⁰

¹ The principle was formulated in Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 525-541, at p. 531. In contemporary debates it is often referred to as the “Needs Principle.” I call it differently, adding reference to “Abilities,” to emphasize that it addresses both the demand and the supply side. It states rights to receive, but also, and in conjunction, duties to give.

² I am not saying that we must proceed in a strictly linear way, from DI to DII, and from DII to DIII. Inquiry is of course more complex, involving epistemic back-and-forth between these dimensions in an ongoing search for reflective equilibrium. In this search, we should also pay serious attention to DIII, which may lead us to rethink our views of DI and DII. Thus, the mistakes in the history of communist politics in the 20th century, especially the insufficient attention to civil and political rights, should motivate the exploration of principles affirming those rights and of institutions implementing them.

³ I concentrate on pages 528-32 of Marx’s text. There is a debate as to whether Marx held substantive moral views about justice. See Norman Geras, “The Controversy about Marx and Justice,” *Marxist Theory*, ed. A. Callinicos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 211-67. I agree with Geras that Marx did hold some such views even if he did not articulate them properly—or even fully recognized that he held them.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 530. On luck-egalitarianism see G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7-8.

⁵ Albert Einstein, “Why Socialism?” *Monthly Review* 1 (1949).

⁶ Marx, *op. cit.*, 530-1. Marx’s sensitivity to individuals’ differences is missed in Pierre Rosanvallon’s otherwise insightful critical discussion of 19th century communism as involving a “desindividualization of the world” in *La Société des égaux* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 175. On the conversion problem see Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), ch. 12. We can interpret Marx’s criticism of talk of “equal rights” for not tracking the specific needs of different individuals as a rejection of certain accounts of equality that do not address what ultimately matters (each person’s access to need satisfaction), rather than as a rejection of the idea that people have equal rights.

⁷ Socialists praise social relations in which “people care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another”. G. A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 2009), 34-5.

⁸ Socialism may differ in these ways from property-owning democracy. See John Rawls's discussion of liberal democratic socialism and property-owning democracy in *Justice as Fairness. A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 135-40. For new developments, see M. O'Neill and T. Williamson, eds., *Property-Owning Democracy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁹ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 187-90.

¹⁰ Meaningful work has been neglected in liberal political philosophy. Puzzlingly, Rawls acknowledges the importance of "meaningful work in free association with others," but takes its "definition" as not being "a problem of justice" (*A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 257-8). However, recent proposals seek to justify reforms at the workplace through fresh developments of Rawls's theory. For example, Samuel Arnold argues that access to work involving authority, responsibility, and complexity is a social primary good to be regulated by the difference principle ("The Difference Principle at Work," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, 2012, 94-118).

¹¹ Geras, op. cit. 264-5. I agree with Geras that Marx did assume a view of justice when presenting the principle.

¹² Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), Part 1.

¹³ Pablo Gilibert, "Cohen on Socialism, Equality and Community," *Socialist Studies* 8 (2012), 101-21.

¹⁴ This was central in Ernesto "Che" Guevara's view of nonalienated work as involving both self-realization and "social duty." See Guevara, *El Socialismo y El Hombre Nuevo* (Mexico DF: Siglo XXI, 1977), 10-1, 78-90.

¹⁵ Lucas Stanczyk argues that work can be conscripted to enhance the well-being of others beyond emergencies. See "Productive Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 40 (2012), 144-64. I take civil and political liberties to be normally, not absolutely constraining; there is a presumption in their favor, but it can be defeated by especially strong reasons. Thus my view is not necessarily incompatible with Stanczyk's. But it is hard to see how considerations of well-being that go beyond basic needs can outweigh central civil and political liberties (Stanczyk's own examples focus on basic health care—which caters for basic needs and the fair value of liberties themselves).

¹⁶ For exploration of the variety and dynamism of human needs and capabilities as characterized in Marx's texts see Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 68-74. Ultimately, Marx's ideal of human flourishing involves the "development of the rich individuality which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption" (*Grundrisse*; London: Penguin, 325). We can drop the hyperbolic, infeasible Marxian depiction of scenarios in which agents develop *all* their powers *fully*, but we can still envision cases in which they achieve a high level of development of some powers in some desirable, chosen, and feasible schedule of activities.

¹⁷ Of course, this desideratum should be constrained by appropriate saving for future generations.

¹⁸ Sen, *The Idea of Justice*; Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). The Rawlsian account of primary goods as what cooperating persons require to develop and exercise their moral powers of rationality and reasonability and to pursue their specific conception of the good is arguably an even more general case of this strategy (see *Justice as Fairness*, sects. 17, 51). For more on the capability approach, see Pablo Gilibert, "The Capability Approach and the Debate Between Humanist and Political Perspectives on Human Rights. A Critical Survey," *Human Rights Review* 14 (2003), 299-325.

¹⁹ Nussbaum acknowledges a debt to Marx in her development of the idea of capability in *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13, 70-4.

²⁰ In alienated labor, workers experience their relation with their productive activity, its products, and other economic agents as meaningless or even as antagonistic. Marx, *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975), 322-34.

²¹ Marx, *Capital 1* (London: Penguin, 1990), 739. See also Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.

²² Marx, *Capital 3* (London: Penguin, 1991), 957-9.

²³ Marx, "Critique of Gotha Program," 531.

²⁴ Gerald Cohen provides instructive critical comments on Marx's philosophical anthropology as failing to account for people's need for "self definition," and its fulfillment through special associations. See *Marx's Theory of History. A Defense*, expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 346-50.

²⁵ For example, Nussbaum suggest that we explore people's capabilities with respect to (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) the use of their senses, imagination and thought, (5) the engagement of their emotions, (6) the use of their practical reason, (7) the development of social affiliation, (8) the concerned relation with other species, (9) activities involving play, and (10) the control of their political and material environment. See *Creating Capabilities*, 33-4. Work can of course display many of these, but it is not the only relevant medium.

We should also have a broad view of what counts as "contribution" under the Contribution Principle and the ANP. For example, it should not only include work in factories and similar sites of formal labor. As feminists have

emphasized, for example, it should also include domestic labor. Furthermore, many abilities should be recognized as productive from a social point of view. For example, people with certain handicaps may still have important abilities to contribute in several ways (and technological development makes this easier).

²⁶ This is also a salient point in the theory of positive freedom advanced in Carol Gould, *Rethinking Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁷ Geras, “The Controversy about Marx and Justice,” 264.

²⁸ In addition, the standards of needs may be quite general to allow for diverse interpretation and elaborations by individuals, thus giving them more liberty (e.g. about what work to pursue if any). Even if we have an expansive view of the good when developing our account of relevant needs, we should be mindful of the prospect that people will disagree about the details.

²⁹ See Castoriadis’s articulation of the idea of “geometric proportionality,” according to which A’s ratio of contribution over ability may be the same as B’s even if their specific contributions and abilities are not identical. Cornelius Castoriadis, *Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe I* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 394.

³⁰ A possible reply is that although some individual workers might not be fully paid when this distribution occurs, they would not be forced, because they belong to the class that collectively controls economic resources and policy (in a socialist society). See Nancy Holmstrom, “Exploitation,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1977), 353-69, at p. 363. For discussion see Kymlicka, op. cit., 204 n.11.

³¹ Norman Geras, “Bringing Marx to Justice. An Addendum and a Rejoinder,” *New Left Review* I / 195 (1992), 37-69, at pp. 60-1.

³² For a survey of the first two views of exploitation see Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 177-87. I say that my proposal helps “in part” to account for the relational wrong of exploitation. There is room for other accounts that are independent from the ANP and capture additional problematic features of exploitation. For example, Nicholas Vrousalis suggests that economic exploitation is a form of domination of others for self-enrichment. See “Exploitation, Vulnerability, and Social Domination,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 41 (2013), 131-57.

³³ Here I differ with the interpretation by Edward Nell and Onora O’Neill, “Justice Under Socialism,” *Justice*, 4rd. ed., ed. J. Sterba (Toronto: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2003), 77-85, at pp. 84-5.

³⁴ The worry about expensive tastes (see 3.3 above) can also be partly addressed by mobilizing these considerations (which yield the responsibility of each not to make unfair demands on others).

³⁵ What is significant, normatively speaking, is effort in a system of fair reciprocity, not actual output, the generation of which partly depends on morally arbitrary differences in endowments (such as native talents) and other circumstances (such as availability of productive work) whose presence is independent of agents’ control. The Contribution Principle arguably partially encodes a concern for fair reciprocity as well, as under it contribution is measured quite generally by the amount and intensity of work, and support is given to those unable to work (Marx, “Critique of Gotha Program,” 530-1).

³⁶ The conditionality holds where complete abundance is absent and consumption goods are the result of productive efforts. If consumption goods were manna falling from the sky, then distribution would not have to track productive efforts. Another caveat: the conditionality considered here assumes focus on consumption goods that meet needs above a basic threshold of subsistence and of whatever is required for people to function as political equals. Everyone should get support to secure those unconditionally (if feasible). See further discussion in 4.4 below.

³⁷ Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 190-3; Richard Arneson, “Meaningful Work and Market Socialism,” *Ethics* 97 (1987), 517-45. Notice that this charge, and responses to it defending (a), can be made both within objective and subjective frameworks by referring, respectively, to a plurality of objective goods and subjective preferences. An objective framework may or may not be perfectionist, depending on how thick or comprehensive the account of the good it relies on is (thus, e.g. Rawls’s framework seems objective without being perfectionist—*A Theory of Justice*, sect. 50).

³⁸ Jon Elster provides the most systematic exploration of the ideal of self-realization in *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 3, and “Self-realization in Work and Politics,” *Alternatives to Capitalism*, ed. J. Elster and K. Moene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127-58. Elster defines the Marxian ideal as follows: “self-realization is the full and free actualization and externalization of the powers and the abilities of the individual” (“Self-realization in Work and Politics,” 131). He shows that this formulation involves an infeasible ideal and must be changed by dropping reference to the “fullness” of self-actualization, re-characterizing its “freedom,” and exploring various ways in which it might succeed in work and politics. Component (f) of my interpretation of the ANP is partly meant to recognize these limits. Elster also emphasizes the contrast between self-realization and consumption. Activities involving self-realization yield raising marginal utility: they are often painful at the beginning, but as capabilities are developed and actualized, they become increasingly enjoyable. Consumption

involves the opposite trajectory. This is also an important point. But I think that there is a risk of overshooting the mark here. Consumption should not be underestimated. Besides the obvious point that it is enjoyable as far as it goes, its significance is often a necessary condition for self-realization in productive labor. As Elster himself explains, self-realization is often partly dependent on the significance of the outputs of the activities in which it arises. Since often the output is consumption goods to meet needs, a lowering of the significance of consumption could threaten the significance of the corresponding productive activities. To make it more significant, we can also think of ways of making consumption more sophisticated. As Elster recognizes, some forms of consumption (e.g. reading poetry) themselves involve self-realization, with its upward trajectory of enjoyment (Ibid., 136).

³⁹ When assessing the implications of the ANP, we should not ignore that any feasible system of distribution depends on the existence of a system of production. Relatedly, in our societies most people are not effectively free to opt out of work. They have to work to make a living. Work is imposed on them by the social circumstances they face, and this makes the duty to offer options of meaningful work more pressing on liberal grounds. See Beate Roessler, "Meaningful Work: Arguments from Autonomy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20 (2012), 71-93, at pp. 76-81.

Let me add that including opportunities for self-realization in production may expand the feasibility of meaningful activity outside of it. Capitalism generates a ferocious pressure to make as much money as possible and to build one's self-esteem through competitive triumphs over others. Countering this selfish, hyper-competitive ethos, socialism could help generate a culture that supports rather than undermines deep relationships (such as friendship) that involve genuine care and sincerity. If production is not thoroughly framed by rapacious competition and profit maximization, it may also be easier to reduce working time and increase access to other activities and goods.

⁴⁰ Carens, "An Interpretation of the Socialist Principle of Distribution," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 20 (2003), 145-77.

⁴¹ Here Carens departs from the earlier statement of his proposal in *Equality, Moral Incentives and the Market* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25. In that text Carens takes the social duty to involve a maximal contribution, although he assumes that agents will balance this consideration against others (Ibid., 34-5).

⁴² It could be objected that organizing workplaces along these lines would hamper efficiency. But in complex modern economies a greater involvement of workers may actually increase productivity. Some argue that "the information revolution is replacing one kind of management (command-and-control) with another (based on self-organization networks)" ("It's Complicated," *The Economist*, November 23, 2013, p. 68). Second, given environmental threats posed by current forms of growth, insisting on productivity as the decisive evaluative factor may be unreasonable. Finally, the idea of efficiency is parasitic on some view of what is to be efficiently delivered. Productivity is not the only relevant consideration to be catered for. Increasing satisfaction in work is surely important, as are other considerations (such as expanding leisure time).

⁴³ Carens is in principle open to modifications like the ones I suggest. For example, he acknowledges that income-consumption could be traded against other concerns and that society might democratically impose constraints on the market economy to enable legitimate different tradeoffs (Ibid., ch. 3).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵ I introduce legal conditionality to deal with the free-riding problem. If and when it doesn't in fact arise I am happy to withdraw it.

⁴⁶ The further flexibility in the framework that I suggest would also help if people want to devote themselves to forms of work that are not recognized as standard work, such as work at home or in the community. We can also recognize these forms of work as counting towards the calculus of the income each would receive. To the extent that measurement problems are overcome, this may be the better option.

A factor which this framework (and Carens's) does not fully account for, however, is that the ability to make an effort, and to derive satisfaction from work, may vary from person to person due to circumstances beyond their control. The same number of hours, or the same activities of work, may not involve the same level of burden for everyone. I do not know how to fully solve this difficulty. Perhaps all realistic implementations of the ANP are partially subject to Marx's criticism of the Contribution Principle as not fully responding to all important individual differences. Barring unlikely scenarios of complete abundance and lack of conflict of interests, it may be practically impossible to reliably allocate job satisfaction, income, leisure, etc., in ways that perfectly track all important personal differences and render everyone exactly equally and maximally well-off overall. Our social arrangements might have to be better or worse approximations without being perfect implementations. Some possible fine-tunings are the following. If each worker identifies work's burdensomeness, external devices like incentives could sometimes be avoided (I owe this suggestion to Kristi Olson). Second, the burdensomeness of work could be partially reduced as opportunities for self-realization in work are made available. Finally, the amount of equal income accrued to those working beyond the set full-time workday could be reduced via increased taxation the

proceedings of which are used to extend further the direct social provision regarding public goods and differentially incurred needs.

⁴⁷ For example, we certainly want government to continue delivering standard forms of control concerning safety of workplaces and products for consumption, even if their details are not uncontroversial.

⁴⁸ Carens explicitly brackets the issue of transition (Ibid., 21), but does not deny its importance. Another difficulty he does not address is that of staffing socially indispensable but generally undesired jobs, such as garbage collection. But one could argue that if people in a socialist society have gained, through experience and socialization, a strong attachment to it, they will recognize that they should devote part of their time to these tasks. We could, e.g., require “every able-bodied person, say from nineteen to twenty, to take his or her turn at a fair portion of the necessary unpleasant jobs” (Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty*; Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985, p. 287). This can be a case in which restricted forms of (democratically scheduled) compulsory work is justifiable. See note 15 above.

⁴⁹ Pablo Gilabert, *From Global Poverty to Global Equality. A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Pablo Gilabert, “Feasibility and Socialism,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 19 (2011), 52-63. For discussions of problems and strategies of political transformation (spanning the spectrum between insurrectional and incremental approaches) see Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, 163-6; and Erik Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), Part III. My discussion of transition in this section is avowedly partial. Important issues not addressed include the problems of emigration and capital flight, international pressure, and violent resistance. I also acknowledge that different transitional paths may be appropriate in different contexts, depending on the course of democratic argument and struggle. What follows are some suggestions about what to propose within that process.

⁵¹ The problem of path-dependence becomes clearer when we consider the institutions generated to implement the distributive principles. If the state becomes larger in the first stage, it may itself become an obstacle for further change (which, in Marx’s ideal, would involve decentralization and autonomous decision-making at the level of productive units). Perhaps choosing a form of market socialism would reduce the problem. On market socialism, see John Roemer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). For criticisms, see Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* sect. IV.

⁵² Both of these points are mentioned by Marx to explain why the early stage is still afflicted by a “bourgeois limitation.” “Critique of Gotha Program,” 531-2.

⁵³ Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx*, 99-100; *Making Sense of Marx*, 230.

⁵⁴ Rawls is less optimistic about the wide endorsability of his Difference Principle than about his other principles of equal civil and political liberties and of fair equality of opportunity. See, e.g., *Justice as Fairness*, 95.

⁵⁵ *A Theory of Justice*, 90.

⁵⁶ Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 367-8.

⁵⁷ In these final reflections I develop points stated in 3.1 (ix-x).

⁵⁸ Pablo Gilabert, “Human Rights, Human Dignity, and Power.” *The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, ed. R. Cruft, M. Liao, M. Renzo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁹ Here I take, and develop further, the idea of “double affirmation” in Marx, “Excerpts from James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*” (*Early Writings*, 277-8).

⁶⁰ For comments I thank two referees, Roberto Gargarella, Carol Gould, Emilio Nadra, Kristin Olson, and audiences at the American Philosophical Association, McGill University, and the University of Palermo.