

Rescuing Socialism from Liberal Justice: Themes from Lukács and Márkus Revisited

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Abstract:

In *Marxism and Anthropology*, Márkus defended the view that Marx's social thought contains an important part of philosophical anthropology, and offered a comprehensive exposition of it. In this paper, I argue that Márkus's exposition of Marx's view helps to answer an important question for socialism: Is there a defensible political theory of socialism that can be distinguished from contemporary egalitarian liberalism? Márkus's book, I argue, provides a very convincing Marxist conception of human essence that can serve as the normative foundation of a distinctive socialist political theory.

I argue that Márkus rightly highlights and articulates Marx's insight that one's well-being hinges on whether one can *self-realize in productive work*. Socialism considers a capitalist market economy objectionable, because workers are structurally coerced to put their labor-power under the hierarchical control of the capitalists to secure their subsistence, rather than freely opting for work for realizing their ability, which is a source of well-being. Most workers are therefore also blocked from accessing the means to develop their capacities and to satisfy their justified needs. As Márkus puts it, capitalism thus forecloses most people's possibility to develop their human potential to the fullest; such a possibility of development, moreover, is made possible by the enhanced productivity in capitalism in the first place.

Therefore, I argue, socialism demands that the production process be structured in a way that workers can properly understand themselves as participating freely in a cooperative enterprise to produce valuable things or services. Resources should then be distributed in accordance to people's justified social needs, rather than through the competitive commodity market. I will show that Márkus's interpretation of the Marxist conception of human essence provides all the essential building block for this political theory of socialism.

I. Introduction

In contemporary political philosophy, most think that socialism should reconstruct its ethical foundation along the lines of liberal egalitarianism.¹ To the extent that it is still meaningful to talk about the distinction between liberalism and socialism, many argue that socialism should be reconceived as merely an institutional variant alongside different forms of welfare state capitalism, all share liberal egalitarianism as their common moral foundation.² I challenge this common view in this article. I will argue for a set of socialist political principles that is grounded on the core and most interesting normative insight of the socialist intellectual tradition, namely the recognition of the value of *work* as an essential arena of people's self-realization and well-being. I will show that this interpretation is distinguished from liberal egalitarianism in its ethical foundation and normative structure. My aim here is to help reopening the debate over the merit of socialism as normative political philosophy, by conceptualizing normative dimensions that are long neglected in existing literature. For this dimension of self-realization in work, I will argue, can better capture people's major source of life concern in facing the challenge posed by the concrete condition of work in contemporary world.

The interpretation of socialism defended here will be built on a reading of two important Marxists' works, which are largely neglected in contemporary debates of normative political philosophy, namely György Lukács and György Márkus. The article is organized as follows. Section II teases out what I take to be the normative foundation of socialism.

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- 1 See, for example, Kymlicka's comment that for those oft-discussed contemporary socialists, such as G. A. Cohen and John Roemer, 'their reconstructions of Marxism have taken them in the direction of liberal egalitarianism', *Contemporary Political Philosophy, 2nd edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 201; see also Pablo Gilabert, "The Socialist Principle 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'", *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46 (2015): 201-202, for recommending socialists to 'move toward the liberal egalitarian framework' in order to 'move toward greater understanding of their own historical contribution'.
 - 2 See, for example, John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 138-139, 178-179; Richard Arneson, "Is Socialism Dead?", *Ethics* 102 (1992): 485-486; Samuel Freeman, "Capitalism in the Classical and High Liberal Traditions", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 28 (2011): 50-52.

Drawing on Lukács and Márkus, I argue that the fundamental insight of socialism is that one's well-being hinges on whether one can self-realize in productive work. Socialism considers a capitalist market economy ethically objectionable because workers are structurally pressured to put their labor-power under the hierarchical control of the capitalists to secure their subsistence, rather than freely opting for work for realizing their ability, which is a source of objective well-being. I will show that such considerations lead to a positive ideal of community of equals in social production. This socialist ideal suggests that the production process be structured in a way that workers can properly understand themselves as participating freely in a cooperative enterprise to produce valuable things or services.

Section III argues that, upon this normative foundation, socialism should be understood as consisting of five normative political principles: (1) freedom of occupation, (2) worker's democratic enterprises, (3) satisfaction of needs that pass public deliberative assessment, (4) democratic state coordination of productive goals and (5) state provisions of public and common goods and social legislation. Section IV argues that these principles are in tension with a central tenet of liberalism, namely the idea of individual responsibility. For liberalism, in matters of distributive justice, an individual citizen should be responsible to decide what, for her, gives value to life and to strive to lead a valuable life. Citizens should be free to act, within the bounds of basic civil and political rights, given material resources and social and economic opportunities among them are justly distributed. It challenges the socialist demands of workplace democracy and distribution in accordance with needs. I argue that socialism can plausibly meet with these challenges.

In section V, I conclude the article by arguing that self-realization in work is superior to the liberal idea of individual responsibility in capturing people's anxiety in contemporary capitalist market society. Therefore, I argue, the idea of socialism as I explicate here is a desirable candidate of realistic utopian political imagination of the future.

II. Socialism: the normative foundation

To understand socialism as a normative political theory means to restate the many social and political ideas invoked in the socialist intellectual tradition as a set of structured normative political principles. These political principles prescribe how the major institutions of a society should be ordered. These principles also specify the natures and contents of its citizens' obligations toward these institutions. Typically, such a set of political principles covers issues in two broad categories: (1) civil and political rights of the citizens and (2) distribution of resources and opportunities for social and economic positions. The second category also includes the setting of economic structure. This is because economic structure significantly affects what material goods are to be distributed, as well as how they are distributed. My interpretation of socialism will focus on the second category.³

Socialism's normative foundation can be reconstructed from its ethical critique of capitalist market economy. A capitalist market economy is an economic system where the distribution of goods and services are mainly based on market exchange and private ownership of means of production. The Marxist philosopher György Lukács's charge of *reification* of people provides an interesting perspective in capturing why a life structured by the capitalist market economy is considered undesirable. But his critical analysis needs to be furnished by an account of human nature and the considerations that support such an account. I think another Marxist philosopher György Márkus best articulates the socialist ideal of agency that supports Lukács's critique. I discuss Lukács's analysis in part A of this section. Part B expounds Márkus's account, though filling up some of the gaps in his narrative by more recent contributions in philosophy and social science.

3 Throughout this article, I assume that socialism have a principled commitment to grant priority to a standard liberal set of civil and political rights and liberties equally to all citizens, such as freedoms of conscience, association and speech, as well as equal rights of political participation. For such interpretation, see Jeremy Waldron, "Karl Marx's 'On the Jewish Question'", in Jeremy Waldron eds, *'Nonsense upon Stilts': Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1987):129-132; see also David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159-161.

A. György Lukács's critique of capitalism

In his influential essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat',⁴ Lukács argued that, in capitalism, people are deeply reified. It is because they are being rendered as commodities rather than free human beings. The paradigm case of reification, for Lukács, is the commodification of labor-power of the working class or the proletariat. Workers in a capitalist market economy are those who need to earn their living by contracting out their use of labor-power to those who effectively control the means of production or productive resources. They (and their capitalist employers) thus view their own physical and psychological attributes predominantly as a kind of resource that can be bought and sold, i.e. as a commodity.⁵

The key issue of reification, for Lukács, is the loss of people's *agency*, i.e. the loss of people's status of creators of social reality.⁶ It is because the social process is largely controlled by the apparently unalterable economic laws of capitalist market economy – those of market demand and supply.⁷ It is the logic of market demand and supply that predominantly determines the price of a commodity, including that of worker's labor-power. Workers' wages, in turn, constitute the major, and sometimes the only source of income for their subsistence. Workers' lives are thus largely subject to, or tailored by, the economic laws and the logic of capitalist market economy.⁸ Most people's life activities are structured around their role as wage laborers, and are largely driven by the fear that one may lose out in market competition.

If we unpack the reason why it is objectionable that workers are reified in Lukács's

4 György Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, Rodney Livingstone trans., (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 83–222.

5 Ibid. 88-89.

6 Ibid. 186-187, 203-204

7 Ibid. 129-130, 155-156, 158-159

8 Ibid. 172.

sense under capitalist market economy, it is because workers are coerced to work.⁹ What drives them in the labor market is the *economic necessity of subsistence*, in a way comparable to *coercion* in a standard sense: comply, or you will be physically harmed or even killed. Since capitalists own and control the means of production, workers can typically only sell their labor-power to the capitalists to earn a living. Otherwise, without access to means of production, the mere labor-power of the workers cannot generate them any material products for subsistence. Typically, this also means that the capitalists have the final say on the shape of the productive process, also in virtue of their control of the means of production. Therefore, workers are coerced to sell their labor-power as a commodity. At the same time, their control of labor-power is also sold to the capitalists. They thus lose the control of their labor-power.¹⁰

Yet, contrary to typical cases of coercion, there are no agents that coerce people by physical threat in the case of coercion by economic necessity. The threat, instead, comes from the market, and cannot be considered as controlled by any agent. In capitalist market economy, less efficient producers or sellers would be the 'losers'. They would be driven out of that market entirely, because they could not survive with the lowest possible selling price of goods. Only the 'winners' could survive with the lowest possible selling price of goods. Therefore, market is inherently a competitive venue.¹¹ In this sense, G. A. Cohen was right to describe the market as driven and people as shaped by 'greed and fear'.¹² It is this competitive structure of the market accompanied with economic necessity of subsistence that coerces most workers into selling the control over their labor-powers to capitalists.¹³

This threat is experienced by the workers as something *appears* to be like unalterable

9 Ibid. 165-166

10 Ibid. p. 166

11 See Frank Knight, "The Ethics of Competition", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 37 (1922), 586-587

12 G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42-43, 58; for a similar observation from political economists, see Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits, "Varieties of Capitalism and Capitalism « tout court »", *European Journal of Sociology*, 50 (2009): 373

13 Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 101-102.

laws of the world of *nature*.¹⁴ You must earn your living by selling labor-power to the capitalist (otherwise you will starve to die), just like you must act in accordance of gravity of the earth (you cannot jump off a cliff or you will die). I believe Lukács argues in this sense that people in capitalism are reified. But the law of market demand and supply that govern the use of labor-power is in fact *social* construction, which should be in principle alterable by people. For Lukács, people are therefore deprived of their exercise of proper human *agency*.¹⁵ As I take it, this is what Lukács considered the evil of reification of people's labor-power.

B. György Márkus's Socialist Account of Human Nature

But what precisely the term *agency* means for Lukács and why and how this deprivation of agency is problematic in a normative sense is still unclear. A positive and more detailed explication is needed. I think this can be found in György Márkus's explication of a Marxist ideal of human agency. This ideal, according to Márkus's interpretation of Marx, should be constructed around a property that is distinctively human, namely *work*, or *production*.¹⁶ According to Marx, as highlighted by Márkus, 'the practical creation of an objective world, the working upon inorganic nature, is vindication that man is a conscious generic being... the animals produce under domination of immediate physical need while man produces *free* of physical need and only genuinely so in *freedom* from such need.'¹⁷ Therefore, work is the way for human beings to exercise their distinctively human power, as opposed to drives that are predicated by the laws of nature.

To exercise this power, then, is in this sense an exercise of human freedom, and an exercise of human agency. Furthermore, Marx had famously argued that:

14 Ibid. 97-98, 129-130, 158-159.

15 In the capitalist market economy, middle class workers typically enjoy a broader range of occupational choices and are less compelled by economic necessity of subsistence than unskilled grassroots workers. But it is rare that a worker – who has no effective control over means of production – can be free from *substantial* compulsion of the economic necessity of subsistence *at all* in a capitalist market economy.

16 György Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, (Van Gorcum, Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp. B. V., 1978), 5

17 Cited in *ibid.* 5, my emphasis.

'In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective*..... In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human need* by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's* essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature... I would have directly *confirmed* and *realized* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal nature*.¹⁸

Therefore, from a Marxist perspective, production is an essential power of human beings. In addition, participation in production is the main way of manifesting one's individuality if those powers used in production are exercised freely. Furthermore, one's individuality as manifested in production can be recognized and respected if the products serve genuine human needs. Productive work is thus an important source of *self-realization* for human beings. For one's free exercise of distinctive human power and agency can only be properly recognized if one's production serves others' needs. From a Marxist perspective, it is of fundamental interest to an individual to achieve self-realization through gaining proper recognition conveyed to one's work. I shall call this 'self-realization in work' thesis.¹⁹

Is this a plausible understanding of human nature? In an instructive article, Jon Elster considered empirical studies on industrial psychology to examine the connections between work and self-realization.²⁰ Of our interest here is the observation that, aside from income, a person has many motivations to work, and it is usually true that one is 'worse off by never working than by holding a regular job'.²¹ Among the important reasons for work is that to participate in work, as long as it is not forced, one can exercise and develop one's ability, given that the challenge of the work is within the range of the worker's abilities. It is also true

18 Karl Marx, "Comments on James Mill", in Elster, J. ed.. *Karl Marx: A Reader*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 34

19 This phrase is coined by Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p. 229.

20 Jon Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of Good Life", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 6 (1986): 97-126.

21 *Ibid.* 111

that via the recognition of one's products by others one can gain self-esteem.²² One may thus say that human beings, or at least those in modern society, have a natural inclination to work and produce and they derive important fulfillment from such actions, provided the work and production are not forced upon them.²³

As Márkus's work rightly emphasize, production has three basic conditions. Among these are, first, cooperation among individuals,²⁴ and second, standards of what is valuable in human lives and thus worth the effort of producing. Therefore, a society with 'a network of norms, of social rules of use' is presupposed.²⁵ A product will not be valuable if it is not responding to some human needs; yet human needs are crucially shaped by social norms and rules. Even basic subsistence needs such as food must be mediated by social norms to take a social form to be considered appropriate for fulfilling human needs. Food must be cooked or made in a socially recognized way for it to be suitable for human consumption, for instance. We cannot consume food in raw as when a lion consumes a rabbit. What is worthy of the deployment of one's labor-power is crucially determined by social norms and rules. Moreover, social forms as structured by social norms also determine the mode, the rate and the limits of production, e.g. the direction and speed of accumulation and development.²⁶ Thirdly, production requires skills and knowledge. Individuals need training and education to realize and develop their power of production. Skills and knowledge are social products. For the process of learning and knowledge accumulation for the use of future generations, are social processes. In this sense, we are all 'social beings'.²⁷

For Márkus, it is crucial to highlight these basic conditions of production. First,

22 Ibid. 112-114, 114-115. See also recent empirical findings that point to similar results, as reported by Christopher Michaelson, et al., "Meaningful Work: Connecting Business Ethics and Organizational Studies", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 121(2014): 79-80.

23 Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics", 104-107

24 Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 67-68

25 Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, .3, 7-8

26 Ibid. 13.

27 Ibid. 16-17, 18-19

Márkus argues that when social norms and rules 'appear to the concerned individuals as external and accidental barriers, alien powers impeding and deforming the manifestation of their personality' as manifested in their production, the problem of *alienation* occurs.²⁸ In capitalism, most workers are blocked from accessing the means to develop their capacities and to satisfy their justified needs. Capitalism thus forecloses most people's possibility to develop their human potential to the fullest; such a possibility of development, moreover, is made possible by the enhanced productivity in capitalism in the first place.²⁹ The capitalist market economy is therefore an alienated one. It is a source of alienation for most if not all people. The root cause of alienation is that the structure of social cooperation and the value standards for production in a capitalist market economy do not 'result from... [people's] conscious and voluntary *association* subject to their own control'.³⁰ Márkus thus argues that we can regain our freedom only if social development is subjected to 'the *conscious* decisions of the *collectively organized* individuals'.³¹

To regain this freedom, as I take it, we need a community of *equals*. People must be treated as equals, and they must be able to reasonably consider and understand themselves as equals in the community. If not, some of the members become *subordinates* to others. This fundamental equality in membership must be manifested in the way collective decisions for social production and distribution of resources are made. Individuals of the community must have sufficient reason to *identify with* the decisions, i.e., they will regard themselves, with other equal members of the community, as joint authors of decisions even if those decisions are different from their own preferences on the issues. In this sense, the interests of individuals in society are unified, and that, as Márkus puts it, they can then properly take up

28 Ibid. 22

29 Ibid. 22

30 Ibid. 24, my emphasis; cf. Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics", 114-115

31 Ibid. 59, my emphasis; cf. also Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics", 120-121, that a proper understanding of the 'joint self-realization' in work is like 'players in an orchestra' – 'the better A does his job, the better B can do his'.

the social point of view as identical to their individual point of view, i.e., social development can be properly evaluated by the level of flourishing of any single individual.³²

How can this community of equals be possible and consistent with everyone's authentic selves? I think this can only be possible if such a community, aside from granting everyone equal standing, can also realize what Charles Taylor called the 'fusion of horizons'. The idea is that the members of a community will engage in motivated, sincere and continuous dialogue.³³ They willingly 'learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background'.³⁴ Therefore, the standard of values and the rules, norms and forms of cooperation in social production can be supported by reasons that are the results of such a 'fusion of horizons' in a community of equals. Disagreements among the members are accommodated within a shared framework of reasons or valuation, and practical resolutions are decided in accordance with this shared framework.

People are motivated to make efforts to reach such a fusion of horizons because it is the only way these standards can be considered as not imposed by others but authentically endorsed by the producers. For socialism, the motivation for convergence of what different individuals see as reasons to act is rooted in people's aspiration of self-realization in work. But the fusion of horizons does not require that people reach consensus on all stages of all issues, all the way down. Even if people adopt such a shared framework of valuation, there can be more than one eligible option. In such cases, depending on the context, different strategies of collective decision making are compatible with people sharing an integrated horizon: random selection, choosing a middle ground between the options, apportion of resources to different groups for their pursuit of their own adhered options, and, of course,

32 Ibid. 46-47.

33 Ibid. 23.

34 Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism*, ed. by Amy Gutmann (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994), 66-67.

majority vote.³⁵

Before proceeding, let me first take stock of what I have argued so far in this rather complex discussion. For socialism, what constitutes the essential human power is human beings' ability to work and produce in a value-purposive way. This is an essential feature of human power, and the free exercise and development of which is a source of recognition and respect. For production that is valuable to others is a source of recognition of one's human power. But the exercising and developing of this power presuppose the existence of a certain form of society, namely a community of equals of which its members achieve a fusion of horizons. It is because what is valuable and worth producing is defined by social forms, rules and norms. Producers consider producing for these standards of value a goal that is worthy of pursuit only if these standards of value are authentically endorsed by them. Only then the fulfillment of such standards becomes a recognition of their efforts. Therefore, self-realization in work is an important aspect of people's objective well-being, and our quest to self-realization through productive work leads us to consider a community of equals of which its members achieve a fusion of horizons as desirable.

Now consider Márkus's take that production is essentially a social activity, that few things can be produced without cooperation. One can identify with the products of such a cooperative venture only if participants authentically endorse the terms of cooperation.³⁶ As Marx puts it, 'Freedom...can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control'.³⁷ Therefore, for both Marx and Márkus, to say that a social development is determined by

35 See Steven Wall, "Neutralism for Perfectionists: The Case of Restricted State Neutrality", *Ethics* 120 (2010): 248, 250-251

36 This is also supported by empirical findings. Michaelson et al. "Meaningful Work", 80, 83, describe various results of industrial psychology researches, and show that if workers have collective control of the workplace and the production process, they will find working more meaningful. The experience of work is therefore more desirable.

37 From *Capital* Vol. III, in Robert C. Tucker ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 441

conscious collectively organized individuals also means that the production processes are organized by the idea of a community of equals with fusion of horizons among its members.

Finally, production requires the development of skill and knowledge via education and training. We can take this to mean that socialism commits to the flourishing of human capacities in general.³⁸ Skills and knowledge as well as the institutions to pass them on are social products. The point of passing on skills and knowledge to all is to develop their essential human powers. As a community of equals, members will regard the promotion of this power as among people's fundamental interests, and will thus look to, as Sibyl Schwarzenbach puts it, 'bring its distinctively human capacities to fruition and its goals into harmony with those of others'.³⁹ The ideal here is a sense of friendship: it is because we value the civic friendship among us that we are concerned about each other's' flourishing, which is enhanced by our collective actions, i.e social production. We can also personally enjoy the great good of maintaining the friendship, the goodness of which lies in the existence of the relationship itself.⁴⁰ We are delighted by seeing our friends flourishing.⁴¹ For socialism, people are motivated to participate in productive work because of their interest in self-realization, and of their interest in facilitating other people's flourishing life.

I conclude this long section by putting together threads from Lukács and Márkus thus far discussed. Márkus's vision of people's self-realization at work, as well as the connected vision of a societal relationship that facilitates this self-realization, is the very opposite of that of capitalist market economy. In Lukács's analysis, people's allocation of their labor-power in a capitalist market society is regarded as governed by an unalterable law of market supply and demand. For capitalism is so structured that workers must sell their labor-power as a

38 See Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, 39-40.

39 Sibyl Schwarzenbach, "Rawls and Ownership: The Forgotten Category of Reproductive Labor," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary 13 (1987): 143-144, 145-146

40 Sibyl Schwarzenbach, "Democracy and Friendship", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 1 (2005):234, 240; "On Civic Friendship", *Ethics*, 107 (1996): 102

41 Schwarzenbach, "On Civic Friendship", 100-101

commodity to the owners of the means of production, driven by the economic necessity of subsistence. People thus lose their agency in their use of essential human power in a capitalist market economy. They therefore fail to realize their essential human power in work and production so structured, and indeed fail to see work and production as constitutive to self-realization. This is not the case in the societal relation envisioned by socialism: in socialism, people in the society only cooperate in work to produce something the society finds valuable, in accordance with a shared framework of valuation they identify with. The core of this social ideal is a community of equals with fusion of horizons. It regulates both the establishment of the standards of value and the organization of productive work in socialism.

III. Socialism: its political principles

If the above articulation of the socialist visions of well-being and the corresponding ideal of society make sense, what can we make of the normative political principles that can be grounded on these visions? Here I find that Marx's famous formulation: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!' is indeed, as he said, an appropriate *slogan* to be inscribed on the banners to spell out the point.⁴² But a slogan is not a principle. This slogan is useful to summarize the point of socialist political principles because it nicely emphasizes, first, the ground for people's claims, and second, the fundamental motivation on the part of individuals to serve these claims. Or so I argue below.

As we have seen, the fundamental insight of socialism is that one's well-being hinges on whether one can self-realize in work. This is the core reason for socialism to consider a capitalist market economy problematic: workers work largely for wages to secure their subsistence, rather than freely opting for work to realize their ability. Therefore, socialism as a normative political theory should prescribe several principles in social organization of

42 Karl Marx, "Critique of Gotha Program", in McLellan, D. ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 615

production and economy.

First, people's *freedom of occupation* should be considered a basic liberty or a basic right. It means that social and economic positions should be open to everyone, and those with the same level of talents and the same willingness to pursue an occupation should have the same opportunity to attain it. Therefore, people's formal right to choose their productive line of work is secured. Liberal capitalist market economy also secures this right for citizens. But mere legal protection from not being coerced into a job does not imply that people will have the substantial right only to participate in productive work that one authentically endorses. They can still be coerced into work because of economic necessity of subsistence, as we have demonstrated in the last section.

Therefore, secondly, to avoid making this freedom of occupation merely formal with respect to one's interest in self-realization in work, the *worker should have control over the production process*. Production for goods and services in modern society are mostly cooperative enterprises. Each of the relatively independent units of production, usually a firm, should be subject to the *democratic control* of all the participating workers. That is, the final decision-making power of the organization of the production process, *i.e. the effective control of the means of production*, should be vested into a worker's cooperative, where each worker should have an equal say. 'One worker one vote' is a necessary organizing principle of these cooperatives, but it should not be a sufficient one: such cooperatives should also be organized in a way that facilitates decision-making to be based on deliberation among the workers. For socialism, these arrangements should not be merely optional, because they are of prime normative importance. Therefore, these arrangements should be protected alongside citizens' basic civil and political rights, *i.e. typically, they should be made constitutional.*⁴³

43 See Joshua Cohen "The Economic Basis of Deliberative Democracy", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 6 (1989): 48-49, for a similar argument. My proposal is different from Cohen's in many ways, but I agree with his argument here.

The next question that concerns a socialist society is: What, then, is to be produced for whom, and how to determine what to produce? Socialism mounts its ethical charge to a capitalist market economy that people's labor-powers are deemed commodities a capitalist market economy. For most workers are wage earners, and their lives are predominately structured by and thus subordinated to the demand and supply of the labor market. For socialism, then, people's choice of work should not be governed or restrained by the law of demand and supply of the labor market.

Note that what is at issue is not producing in accordance with people's demands within the constraints of supply of resources and labor-power, as such. Any system of social production must take demand and supply into account in this sense. The problem, rather, lies in the fact that in a capitalist market economy, people's demand is set to match with the supply of goods and services by a *competitive market*. The suppliers of commodities are disciplined to produce in the most effective way to meet people's corresponding demand, through the *fear* that their products will not be bought, and that they will thus be outperformed by others. The demands that a market tries to meet, in turn, are only those preferred by individuals who have sufficient *buying power*, so that the suppliers of commodities can reap profits by selling them the goods and services. There are, in principle, no restrictions on what sorts of demands should be met: the final determinant is the size of buying power backing such demands. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that what creates the strongest market demands are people's *needs* supported by *good reasons*. It is this way of connecting people's demand and supply for goods and services that socialism deems as oppressive, in that it makes people's labor-power subject to the control of alienating forces.

Therefore, a different way to link up people's demand and supply of goods and services is needed in a socialist society. Here the socialist vision of community of equals in which members realize a fusion of horizons kicks in. In a socialist society, what is to be

produced will be determined by democratic deliberation structured to fit with the ideal of a community of equals that fusion of horizons is realized. Only demands supported by *good reasons* from the perspective of people's *needs* should be considered as justified production goals. As the German Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch put it in his celebrated essay, an ideal socialist society should have 'a public *assessment* of demand... which replaces the production for the market in an exchange economy with pure production according to demand.'⁴⁴ The state should be responsible to coordinate workers' democratic cooperative enterprises to meet these publicly assessed production goals.⁴⁵

What are the needs that could be supported by good reasons and pass the test of democratic deliberation? I think what Axelsen and Nielsen coin as the 'central areas of human life' is a useful approximation.⁴⁶ They include '*capabilities related to basic needs* such as basic health, decent housing, adequate education', as well as 'fundamental interest of all human beings in social setting such as rational development of critical thought, respectful social relation and political freedoms'; what people make of these provisions regarding their own personal values, relations and attachments is, however, left open to individual citizens.⁴⁷

Finally, it is also the state's responsibility to take up those tasks, funded by citizens' contributions to the productive surplus, that involve public and common goods, as Marx would have it, such as 'replacement of the means of production used up', 'expansion of production', 'reserve or insurance funds to provide against accidents, dislocations caused by natural calamities', 'common satisfaction of needs, such as school, health services', 'funds for

44 Karl Korsch, "What is Socialization? A Program of Practical Socialism", *New German Critique*, 6 (1975): 76.

45 See *Ibid.*, 76. See also, Karl Korsch, "Fundamental of Socialization", in pp. 124-135 of *Karl Korsch: Revolution Theory*, Douglas Kellner eds. (Austin, London: University of Texas Press, 1974), 130-132.

46 David V. Axelsen & Lasse Nielsen, "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress", *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 23 (2015): 409

47 *Ibid.* 409-410. For similar formulation, see Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, 228-229. See also Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice", *Feminist Economics* 9 (2003): 41-43.

those unable to work', etc.⁴⁸ We can also include social legislations concerning workplace safety, standards and regulations for the production process, and reasonable terms and protection clauses for workers in labor contracts. Relevant legal regulations of this sort will still be needed for the sake of effective coordination, mutual assurances and tackling epistemic limits of human beings.⁴⁹

The slogan 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' nicely sums up the normative insights of this set of socialist political principles: (1) freedom of occupation, (2) worker's democratic enterprises, (3) satisfaction of needs that pass public deliberative assessment, (4) democratic state coordination of productive goals and (5) state provisions of public and common goods and social legislation. For in a society governed by such a scheme of principles, citizens are motivated to work by the interest of self-realization through participating in valuable work, and what products are worth the effort of producing is determined by what can be deliberatively justified as human needs. It is, therefore, from the free exercise of one's ability that justified human needs of others are satisfied. Furthermore, under such a scheme of social cooperation, citizens of all walks can be assured that their justified needs will be satisfied, by the goods and services produced by others. It is thus a manifestation of what G. A. Cohen called 'communal reciprocity' that 'I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me... I desire to serve them while being served by them, and I get satisfaction from both sides of the equation'.⁵⁰

IV. How Socialism is 'Illiberal', for good

In this section, I put into focus some distinctive features of my explication of

48 Marx, "Critique of Gotha Program", 613

49 See Korsch, "What is Socialization?", 65-66, 74.

50 G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 39-41.

socialism as a normative political theory, by contrasting it with what I take to be a distinctive feature of a standard version of liberalism. The difference between socialism and liberalism, I will argue, reflects a difference in structure of their normative political theories. Like socialism, liberalism is a complex intellectual tradition of political thought that defies any canonical formulation. Here, I can only pinpoint one feature of contemporary liberal egalitarianism that is shared by many, if not most, liberal political theorists.⁵¹ It is also the feature that vindicates one of the most important liberal challenges to socialism. Yet, by defending the account of socialism I have expounded in the last two sections, I will argue that what is problematic is this core feature of liberalism, rather than socialism.

This feature is the idea of *individual responsibility*.⁵² Central to the normative core of liberalism is that individual citizens should be equally entitled to the right to pursue their own, probably diverse, incommensurable and conflicting conceptions of good life. It should be an individual's responsibility to decide what, for her, gives value to life.⁵³ Thus, for liberalism, in addition to protecting everyone's civil and political rights, material resources and social and economic opportunities among citizens should also be justly distributed. It is to ensure that all individuals are symmetrically and impartially situated, in the relevant economic and social senses, so that they are not advantaged or disadvantaged compared to others in the condition in which they can lead their own life.

The idea is that this is necessary for individuals to take special and final responsibility for their own conceptions of good life. Since everyone is given an equal condition to freely lead their own life, they are also treated as equals. The mere fact that a citizen is in need can

51 For simplicity and to avoid repetition, hereafter in this article I will use 'liberalism' as shorthand to contemporary egalitarian liberalism and, correspondingly, 'liberal' (theory or theories, for instance) for 'contemporary egalitarian liberal'.

52 For the discussion of this article I set aside other meanings of the term *responsibility* might convey, for instance, the idea of role-responsibility that specify someone is responsible for certain duty in virtue of his or her holding of certain position.

53 See Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 5.

partly ground her claim to access to some share of resources. But it is not, under liberalism, sufficient to establish the case that such need should be satisfied. Rather, such need is entitled to be satisfied only if that valuable good belongs to that person's just share of resources. It follows that any free use of citizens' just shares of resources, to the extent that it is consistent with other civil and political rights, should be allowed.⁵⁴ In other words, the idea of individual responsibility allows people's differential level of advantages to be determined solely by the consequences of individuals' choices. It allows the maximization of the gap between those who choose 'better' in the relevant sense and those who choose 'worse'. A liberal state, under this view, has no grounds to interfere with this.⁵⁵

A corollary of the affirmation of the idea of individual responsibility is that an ideal and egalitarian market is justified. The fundamental requirement of justice is to treat people as equally responsible individuals, and that can only be achieved by an ideal market together with a background equality of resources and opportunity, so that, as Dworkin famously puts it, an 'equal share of social resources be devoted to the lives of each of its members, as measured by the opportunity cost of such resources to others.'⁵⁶ The cost of leading one's own life is measured and determined by the demand of others to the supply of scarce resources, given equality of relevant conditions for all.

This idea is best illustrated by Dworkin's idea of a hypothetical auction. Given each

54 See, Ibid. chapter 3; See also his "Liberalism" in Stuart Hampshire ed. *Public and Private Morality*. (Cambridge U Press, 1978): 130. Many contemporary liberals agree on this point. For instance, Jonathan Quong argues that the commitment to "personal responsibility" is the core value of contemporary liberal egalitarian justice. See Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism without Perfection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123-124. Jonathan Wolff also argues that the shared basis of liberal egalitarianism is to give "a central place to the idea of individual responsibility within equality": see his "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos Revisited", *Journal of Ethics*, 14 (2010): 335-336. Rawls has a similar formulation when he discussed the problem of expensive tastes. See John Rawls, "Social Unity and Primary Good", in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams eds, (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 168-169, 170-171

55 I draw this idea from an instructive article of Zofia Stemplowska, "Responsibility and Respect", in Carl Knight and Zofia Stemplowska eds. *Responsibility and Distributive Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 115-135.

56 Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, 70, 112; "Ronald Dworkin Replies", in Justine Burley eds *Dworkin and His Critics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 342-343

individual has equal 'bidding power' (i.e. equal amount of clamshells), each price for a given unit of resources will be offered to all and open for bidding, and no one could get anything until market-clear price is reached for all resources that are there for bidding. Thus, the price of a given unit of resources is sensitive only to how much bidding power an individual wish to use for that unit against that of other individuals. In that sense, one shapes what sort of resources one could get for the pursuit of one's own life, with the cost determined by how others, who also have equal bidding power, would like to bid from a same pool of scarce resources. The result of such an ideal egalitarian market is the cumulative result of free and responsible choices made by citizens within a background equality of conditions.⁵⁷ In other words, since the idea of individual responsibility is taken to be constitutive to the political morality of liberalism, an ideal and egalitarian market for the distribution of material resources, opportunities, as well as the contents and structures of productive work should also be considered constitutive to liberal political theory. That is, such a market must be taken as a constitutive institution of any political arrangement that is qualified as 'liberalism'.⁵⁸

This liberal idea of individual responsibility challenges socialism on both ends. On the production end, the socialist proposal of making workers' democratic enterprises constitutional is deemed as unjust. It is because liberalism, within the limits of taking individual responsibility seriously, cannot have any grounds for regulating the form of labor contracts and the control of means of production against background equality of resources. Liberalism cannot prohibit people to sell their labor-power for whatever returns if all people have their fair shares of resources. People can also use their fair shares of resources as capital to employ workers, retaining all the subsequent profit from the production save the wages paid to the workers. It is up to people's deals protected by freedom of contract. This freedom

57 See Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, Chapter 2, esp. 65-83

58 For a similar analysis of the connection of market and liberalism, see Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 3.

is in turn protected because it is an implication of allowing people to freely use their fair shares, given it is consistent with those basic civil and political rights.

Therefore, liberalism cannot support legislating democratic workplace structures as constitutional, or even grant them subsidies or legal dispensations.⁵⁹ For it is a limit to people's free use of their fair shares of resources, as well as a limit to their free use of labor-power. Of course, many labor rights in the workplace, for liberalism, can be protected and promoted because they are instrumental for protecting people's basic rights. Furthermore, a fully democratic workplace is certainly *allowed* if it is formed by free contracts. But a liberal state must stop short of any principled commitments to full democratic control of the enterprises by workers' cooperatives.

On the distribution end, from the liberal perspective, the mere fact that people are in need is insufficient in providing moral guides for who should get what. That one is in need does not specify who is *responsible* for satisfying this need, as well as *to what extent* this need should be satisfied. It is especially true if we take into consideration that, for socialism, needs are not only those basic needs for one to survive that fall into the purview of humanitarian concerns. Socialists would have to include other human capacities that people may wish to develop to lead a flourishing life. But people have diverse ways of leading a flourishing life, and the resources needed will then be different. Should we therefore say that people are entitled to attain an equal level of flourishing (whatever that might mean), and thus have *unequal shares* of resources? Or that people should be entitled to equal shares of resources, and thus lead *unequally flourishing* lives? Why should some people have more merely because their conception of a flourishing life is expensive? Why, alternatively, should one lead a less fulfilling life than others merely because it is more expensive? Either way

59 Robert Taylor, "Illiberal Socialism", *Social Theory and Practice*, 40 (2014): 444-446

seems to be problematic in treating people's needs equally.⁶⁰ Yet socialism's emphasis on need satisfaction fail to provide guidance on which one is the proper or fair arrangement.

But these charges against socialism is, in closer analysis, implausible. Socialists could retort that individual responsibility in distributive justice should not be taken so seriously in the first place. The value of choice tracks the value of freedom only if the alternative options that are up to one's choosing are valuable. Freedom of choice implies freedom only when one is given sufficient meaningful alternatives to choose from, so that people's choices are significant but not irrelevant. If we do not allow one to choose to be a murderer or to contract herself to slavery with their fair shares of resources, why then should we allow people to choose to be capitalists or sell their labor-powers for a living? What human interest is protected by putting one's labor-power under the hierarchical control of others (that is, the capitalists), and *therefore deny* oneself the self-realization in productive work?⁶¹ One should not conflate this with a restriction of freedom of occupation. What is banned in socialism is not people's options of occupation, but only a distinctive (and bad) way of organizing work, namely the wage-labor, within which workers must become subordinate to the hierarchical command of the capitalists.

On the distribution side, it should be noted that the socialist principle of need is not a blanket principle that endorses whatever individuals prefer. Only those needs that can be justified in public deliberation to be contributory to people's objective well-being are entitled to be satisfied. Human interests are not so radically diverse. It is also false that some of them simply cannot be made sense by anyone other than the individuals' subjective understanding. One can always explain to others, with reasons that are accessible to them, what is needed for one's life to go better. At any rate, it is uncontroversial that this is true for the cases that concern us, namely those aspects of life that can be improved with the help of others.

60 Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. 187-188

61 Cohen, "The Economic Basis of Deliberative Democracy" 48-49

In addition, these needs are *satiabile*. Take education and the training of skills. It is of course true that one can always further develop one's skills in some professions or activities, and strive for excellence is always said to be an unending journey. Yet it is also true that at some point it is agreed that one has been provided with sufficient resources and opportunity to develop a skill: *one does not need to ask for more from others*. I believe a similar structure is true for, say, one to have a decent shelter, good health, be well-fed, and so on.⁶² Socialism can plausibly claim that those who have unsatisfied needs are entitled to ask for resources from those who have more than enough to satisfy their needs, and that those who have more urgent needs have priority in satisfying their needs over those whose needs are less urgent.

V. Conclusion and Implication

I have argued that the main reason for socialism to consider a capitalist market economy to be ethically objectionable is that workers work largely for wages to secure their subsistence. They thus place their labor-power under the hierarchical control of the capitalists, rather than freely opting for work for realizing their human power and ability. A central normative commitment of socialism, I have argued, is that productive work should be driven by one's interest in self-realization and be motivated by our interest to serve others' human needs. From this normative foundation, I argued that socialism should consist of a set of five political principles: (1) freedom of occupation, (2) worker's democratic enterprises, (3) satisfaction of needs that pass public deliberative assessment, (4) democratic state coordination of productive goals and (5) state provisions of public and common goods and social legislation.

This set of principles, I have shown in the last section, is incompatible with a central tenet of liberalism, namely the idea of individual responsibility. Yet I have shown that

62 Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 235-236, 240-244

socialism can meet with its challenges. Indeed, the two central ideas of socialism, namely self-realization in work and the satisfaction of justified needs, are precisely the normative dimensions that the liberal idea of individual responsibility fails to respect. If my explication of the desirability of these two ideas are sound, then it undermines the plausibility of the liberal idea of individual responsibility.

I think socialism therefore fares better than liberalism in explaining people's major life concern in contemporary capitalist market society, and thus also in articulating a more relevant political imagination to our future. A defining feature of the 'neo-liberal' capitalist market society we have now is the overwhelming job flexibility and uncertainty created by extreme marketization of the labor process as well as the whole society.⁶³ On the one hand, public services and social securities are increasingly privatized, and thus are put into the logic of market demand and supply. Instead of focusing on serving people's needs in the society, as privatized entities they need to make the generation of sufficient profit for themselves as the primary goal. It follows that a general market crisis, such as the one we have from 2008 onwards, would inevitably let down the public goods that are supposed to serve people's needs; indeed, even the costs of these market losses are to be socialized to the public.⁶⁴

On the other hand, since the last two decades of the twentieth century, the power of union was seriously undermined, accompanied by an expansion of rights of choices of individual employees.⁶⁵ A more flexible labor market means that individuals are compelled to 'cultivate the spirit of self-entrepreneurialism and adaptation to the demands of employers and the market to remain employable'.⁶⁶ Yet the benefit of flexibility typically are only accessible to those who have more marketable talents (and, of course, to the capitalists, too).

63 Albenazmanova, "Crisis? Capitalism is Doing Very Well. How is Critical Theory?", *Constellations* 21 (2014): 360; James Chamberlain, "Bending over Backwards: Flexibility, Freedom and Domination in Contemporary Work", *Constellation* 22 (2015): 92-93, 101

64 Azmanova, "Crisis? Capitalism is Doing Very Well", 361

65 Chamberlain, "Bending over Backwards", 93-95

66 *Ibid.* 98-99.

The drawback of flexibility, i.e. the risks and insecurities due to more flexible labor contract and more severe market competition, however, hit hard mainly to those who have less marketable talents and capitals.⁶⁷

As we have seen, the liberal idea of individual responsibility has not much to say about this emergent *market society*, as Michael Sandel nicely coins it.⁶⁸ For the institution of market is deemed by the liberal idea of individual responsibility as constituted to treat people as free and equal. The only constraint it puts on market is that the market should be operated against a background of fair distribution of resources and opportunities. As we have already seen, this is compatible with the commodification of labor-power. Indeed, the liberal idea of individual responsibility is *in principle* compatible with the extremely marketized society, however risky and insecure it is to people, provided people's resources and opportunity are fairly distributed. Liberals can of course call for a more egalitarian distribution of resources and opportunities among people. Yet, they have no grounds to object this very *economic structure* of the capitalist market society.

In contrast, socialism's commitments to self-realization in work and the satisfaction of justified needs are more relevant to the major life concern of people in such a situation. For they call for a radical de-commodification of the society. The productions of goods and services are coordinated in a way that ensures people's justified needs can be served. The labor-process is also protected from market competition. People can exercise their agency in work by both democratic participation in the workplace and public deliberation in the society-wide level to determine what needs of people are justified to be served. The socialist political principles thus call for a fundamental reconstitution of the economic structure that tackle head-on the problem of extreme marketization and job insecurities.

Of course, the socialist principles are utopian in the sense that it is not obvious that

67 Ibid. 100; Azmanova, "Crisis? Capitalism is Doing Very Well", 360-361

68 See Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: Moral Limits of Market* (New York: Allen Lane, 2012), 10-11

they may be politically feasible immediately, given the present distribution of political forces. Yet, I contend that socialism as explicated in this article is a desirable candidate of political imagination to our future. It is also distinctive from liberal egalitarianism, indeed much better than the latter in terms of relevance to the pressing problem of our time. Socialism has long been casted away from the focus of contemporary political philosophy as a distinctive normative vision. I hope the reformulation of it by revisiting György Lukács's and György Márkus's instructive but largely neglected work contribute to help us to reconsider the point and merit of socialism for our time.

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