REAL INTERESTS, WELL-BEING, AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

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In a common, pejorative sense of it, ideology consists in attitudes whose presence contributes to sustaining, by making them seem legitimate, social orders that are problematic. An important way a social order can be problematic concerns the prospects for well-being facing the people living in it. It can make some people wind up worse off than they could and should be. They have "real interests" that are not properly served by the social order, and the interests aligned with it are in fact "false," merely "apparent," or "distorted." Ideology critique consists in part in noting the existence of such different interests, and in challenging the latter to facilitate the fulfillment of the former. This picture of ideology critique implies that ideology thwarts well-being. This paper aims to clarify, develop, and vindicate this picture. It argues that ideology critique should indeed draw (inter alia) on prudential considerations, and that a specifically objectivist view of well-being would be fitting. The fruitfulness of this approach is shown by exploring the specific case of the critique of working practices in contemporary capitalism.

1. Introduction

In a common understanding of it, ideology consists in attitudes (beliefs, desires, values, emotions, etc.) whose presence contributes to sustaining, by making them seem legitimate, social orders that are in fact problematic. An important way a social order can be problematic concerns the prospects for well-being facing the people living in it. It can make some people wind up worse off than they could and should be. They have "real interests" that are not properly served by the social order, and the interests aligned with it are in fact "false," merely "apparent," or "distorted." Ideology critique consists in part in noting the existence of such different interests, and in challenging the latter to facilitate the fulfillment of the former. This picture of ideology critique implies that ideology thwarts well-being—i.e. that it blocks or hampers people's pursuit of what would make their lives go well for them. This paper aims to clarify, develop, and vindicate this picture.

Should ideology critique really draw on considerations of well-being? If so, what kind of conception of well-being would be most appropriate? In recent work in the field of critical theory[1] there have been significant contributions to our understanding of the moral principles, social mechanisms, and epistemological resources that are relevant for ideology critique, but not enough has been done to illuminate prudential reasons. There has been neglect of the prudential dimension altogether, hostility to it, or reliance on what I think are mistaken, subjectivist views of well-being. This paper fills the gap with a more explicit discussion, and argues for two theses. The first is that ideology critique should indeed draw on considerations of well-being. An exploration of well-being is worthwhile because ideologies of well-being are key factors in the reproduction of problematic social orders, and better views of well-being can help justify and guide social change. The second thesis is that an objectivist view of well-being would be most fitting to make sense of the idea of real interests. An objectivist view holds that what is non-instrumentally good for people

[1] I construe "critical theory" broadly, to include members of the Frankfurt School tradition but also other scholars (e.g. Haslanger 2021a, 2021b; Shelby 2003; Wright 2010; Young 1990) who share the aim of combining philosophical and social-scientific research to explain, challenge, and imagine alternatives to social domination and oppression, and who also envision cooperation with activists and policy-makers seeking to ameliorate the problems they theorize about.

is that in their lives they engage certain goods which they have reason to want even if they do not already want them. This position contrasts with a purely subjectivist view, which reduces all instances of what is non-instrumentally good to the satisfaction of individuals' pro-attitudes (their wants, values, etc.).

This paper does not offer a comprehensive theory of ideology. My main objective is to illuminate certain core normative structures concerning the relations between ideology critique and well-being. I will, however, consider how an objectivist view of well-being interacts with other (moral, epistemological, social-scientific) dimensions of critical theory, and what overall picture would emerge in reflective equilibrium. I will also show how my two theses are explanatorily fruitful by considering the specific case of the critique of working practices in contemporary capitalism, in particular regarding the problem that in them workers' self-determination and self-realization are stunted rather than unleashed. Furthermore, I will address some objections. I will pay special attention to the worry that articulating social criticism by reference to well-being, and particularly objectivist conceptions of it, would heighten the risk of authoritarianism and paternalism.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines an approach to ideology critique in relation to others (2.1), the significance of well-being in it (2.2), and the defense of this paper's theses in reflective equilibrium (2.3). Section 3 then shows that the approach has illuminating implications regarding some important topics in critical theory, including the relations between the good and the right (3.1), the assessment of critical pronouncements (3.2), the plurality of types of critique (3.3), and the combination of social criticism and anti-authoritarianism (3.4).

2. The Approach Proposed

2.1. Ideology Critique

2.1.1. The term "ideology" is often used to refer to more or less widespread beliefs, desires, normative commitments, emotions, and other attitudes constituting a "form of consciousness" that are relevant for explaining the reproduction and change of social orders. There are many specific accounts of ideology (Ostrowski 2022). I will focus on what Geuss (1981: ch.1) calls the "pejorative" sense of ideology, which is typical in critical theory. In this sense, an ideology is a more or less widespread set of attitudes that lead those who have them to sustain a social order that is problematic. This evaluative and critical sense differs from a "descriptive," non-evaluative one referring to attitudes that sustain a social order (without judging whether the order is problematic), and also from a "positive," evaluative but non-pejorative sense identifying the ideas held by agents seeking to change a problematic order.

There are two essential aspects of ideology in the pejorative sense. The first is cognitive deficiency. Ideological attitudes involve false, distorted, or at least significantly incomplete or misleading views about what exists, what is desirable, and what is feasible. People with ideological attitudes fail to grasp important truths about what is valuable or about how to achieve it. The upshot is that they do not see that, or how much, a social order is problematic, or if they do see problems in it, they mistakenly think that there are no practicable alternatives that are better. Second, ideological attitudes have a stabilizing effect. Problematic social orders are sustained, in part, through coercion, by the imposition of harm on those who challenge it. But the mistaken views about their desirability or unsurpassability also play an important role in cementing people's willing allegiance to them. Ideology underlies this "distinctive phenomenon of complicit agency

within oppressive frameworks" (Haslanger 2021a: 14). In sum, ideological attitudes are cognitively deficient views about what is actual, what is desirable, and what is feasible, which causally contribute to stabilizing a problematic social order by shielding it from contestation and efforts of transformation.

This characterization of ideology relies on Geuss (1981: ch.1). However, I present the first aspect more broadly to explicitly include deficiencies regarding normative as well as empirical knowledge.[2] I also omit the language of "function" in describing the second aspect to avoid functionalist commitments in social theory and science.[3] Geuss mentions a third potential aspect of ideological attitudes, which concerns an epistemically problematic genesis—such as wishful thinking or self-serving rationalizations. I agree with Stahl (2024: 140) that it is not a necessary component of ideology: Some views that are false and supportive of problematic social orders, such as racist outlooks ranking members of certain racial groups as emotionally and intellectually inferior, deserve to be called ideological independently of their origin (which often is hard to ascertain empirically).[4] However, although I do not take it as part of the definition of ideology, I recognize that epistemically problematic genesis is an important phenomenon that can help explain why people initially adopt, or remain stubbornly attached to, some ideological outlooks (Shelby 2003: 171-2). In fact, it is common in critical theory to envision ideology critique as a process in which people unleash their critical capacities (Celikates 2017, 2021) and undergo learning processes (Jaeggi 2018) that allow them to revise attitudes they formed in social contexts that block them.

I should add, to prevent misunderstandings, that although in this paper I construe ideologies as sets of attitudes which agents hold in their minds and influence their behavior, (a) they involve a wide variety of instances (including for example beliefs, desires, values, and emotions) and (b) they arise in the context of individuals' embeddedness in certain material and social circumstances (and thus reference to the latter is relevant for the explanation of the emergence of the former).[5] These points apply to the formation of what we can call "ideological stories." They involve clusters of ideological attitudes that influence people in their social life, shaping their social identities and choices (for example as workers in a capitalist society). Let us consider some examples.

2.1.2. Take the case of the organization of work in capitalist societies. Critical theorists view it as problematic because it pushes workers into practices that involve their domination, exploitation,

[2] Geuss (1981: 30-1) is not fully clear on whether prudential and moral claims can be true or false and on whether knowledge about their objects is possible.

[3] For a critique of functionalism see Elster (1986: ch.2).

[4] As Geuss (1981: 20-1) and Shelby (2003:170-1) point out, a problematic origin is also not sufficient for attitudes to be false or have problematic effects. For further discussion on ideology and the formation of beliefs, see Elster (1983: sects. IV-3-4).

[5] These points should assuage worries that my characterization of ideology is excessively rationalistic or individualistic. As Elster (1983: ch.IV; 1986: ch.9) points out, an account that is not functionalist and focuses on agents' psychological processes can also illuminate their emotions and the relational features of their circumstances. Reference to the latter helps explain the sub-intentional formation of their attitudes, which may not be rational. While Frankfurt School theorists emphasize psychoanalytic approaches to this formation, Elster surveys "cold" and "hot" mechanisms in cognitive psychology, illuminating affective mechanisms and inferential mistakes that generate some ideological attitudes. For example, people may adapt their aspirations to their subordinated position in inegalitarian social structures to reduce the dissonance and frustration experienced when aiming at goals they think unattainable, and members of a privileged class may, through a *pars pro toto* fallacy, come to believe that "the causal processes they can observe from their particular standpoint are also valid for the economy as a whole" (Elster 1986: 171-2). See further notes 10 and 11.

and alienation: they are subject to the will of others in the shaping of the terms on which they work, their vulnerability is taken advantage of by more powerful employers to get them to give more than they ought to, and their their ability to develop a positive sense of themselves through activities that feature the expression of their talents and skills is stunted rather than unleashed. Justice for workers would require that they have real opportunities for productive practices in which they access the highest levels of self-determination and self-realization that are feasible and can be secured at reasonable cost for all. To achieve this, social cooperation would have to be re-structured so that workers are not only asked to give, but are also entitled to act and receive in ways that duly support their freedom and well-being.

Why do workers consent to work under conditions of domination, exploitation, and alienation? Part of the explanation might be that there are effective ideological stories that tie them to those conditions. Here are some examples:[6]

- S1: The descriptive view that agreements in the labor market are struck by fully free and equal parties rather than by highly unequal bargainers (with employers holding means of production and the workers only their labor power).
- S2: The ideal of competitive individualism, according to which our personal worth (and our self-esteem) is based on whether we are winners in competitive practices.
- S3: The descriptive idea of the *homo oeconomicus*, according to which we are exclusively, or at least predominantly driven by selfish motives.
- S4: What social psychologists call the "fundamental attribution error," which in explaining an individual's predicament gives too much weight to their personal dispositions and choices and not enough to their social circumstances.
- S5: The discourse of the "happiness industry," in which psychologists, journalists, and firms' consultants insist that whether we are happy predominantly depends on our choice to develop positive attitudes rather than on the nature of social institutions and our collective action to improve them.
- S6: The incentives argument for inequality, according to which allowing inequalities of income, wealth, and other social and economic advantages is reasonable because they incentivize people to be more productive, with the result that we all end up better off than we would be under less inegalitarian arrangements. Versions of this argument rely on inaccurate beliefs about how economic systems work (such as the common "trickle down" view), one-sided descriptive beliefs about people's motivations, or problematic moral beliefs about what we should aim at (such as the most beneficial inequality rather than the highest feasible equality).
- S7: The American (Canadian, etc.) dream holding that if we work hard, we will be economically well off.
- S8: A specific version of the duty of contribution according to which we ought to work, rather than be "parasites," quite independently of the conditions under which work is available to us.
- S9: The idea that conditions of work in the current phase of capitalism generates unprecedented opportunities for freedom and cooperation, allowing us to choose our schedules, cooperate in projects shaped by horizontal teams, or stand within firms as independent players (e.g. as "partners" rather than as mere "employees" in the gig economy).

[6] These stories can interact (e.g. S2 is often associated with S3 and S4).

- S10: The idea that the value of work is exclusively instrumental (e.g. as a source of income) and that freedom and well-being should be sought outside of it. This idea is shared by some critiques of "workism."

These stories are common in contemporary capitalist societies. They all seem to involve errors or distortions and to be quite consequential in motivating people to accept problematic features of their social environment.[7] They are thus fitting objects for ideology critique.

2.1.3. What is ideology critique? It consists in showing that certain attitudes are ideological: that in the social orders those attitudes sustain people are worse off than they could and should be. It also proposes revisions of the attitudes that enable people to seek more of what is good for them or is owed to them. As Geuss (1981: 58, 61, 70) points out, ideology critique aims to induce a form of self-reflection that fosters enlightenment and emancipation. Enlightenment involves noticing and correcting cognitively deficient views about ourselves and our society, and emancipation involves getting rid of partly self-imposed attitudes through which we sustain the problematic forms of social life we are enmeshed in. The aim, in other words, is truth and freedom.

Ideology critique is thus part of a dynamic effort to direct and improve our lives. When we engage in it, we correct our deficient cognitions—noticing the errors in ideological stories such as S1-S10—and activate our imagination to entertain different ways of organizing our societies. These operations exhibit a pattern featuring a sequence of attitudes of identification, de-identification, and re-identification. We make negative judgments about our social condition—distancing ourselves from our earlier acceptance of it—and proceed to a new positive, prospective articulation of alternative social configurations that would be better.

In Marx's writings, for example, it is common to find critical operations showing that what appears harmonious is in fact conflictual, that what appears to be in the equal interest of all in fact benefits some at the expense of others, that what seems natural is actually a contingent historical configuration, and that there are in the present resources and tendencies enabling new social configurations that more fully serve the interests of all.[8] These cognitive operations help us see that our social order is problematic and that changing it is feasible. In Marx's view, they should be paired with a decision to engage and develop the incipient dynamics of transformation that lead beyond it.[9] These theoretical and practical processes can be more or less profound, depending on how extensive our new critical understanding is, and how ambitious our transformative projects become. In Marx's case, the processes involve the understanding and dissolution of exploitative economic structures, but processes targeting other injustices (such as oppression and domination based on nationality, race, or gender), or envisioning less radical changes, can of course be entertained.

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[7] See, e.g., Marx (1990: 279-80) on S1; Gilabert (2023b) on S2; Bowles and Gintis (2011) on S3; Aronson and Aronson (2018) on S4; Cabanas and Illouz (2019) on S5; Cohen (2008) on S6; Gilabert (2023a: 54, 133-5) on S8; Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) on S9; Deranti (2022) on S10. Also relevant is Marx's (1973: 83–5) critique of views that ignore the extent to which we are socially dependent on each other. "Individuals producing in society—hence socially determined individual production—is, of course, the point of departure"; the "independent, autonomous subjects" of many eighteenth-century theories are "Robinsonades," "illusions."

[8] Marx (1973: 83-8; 1978d: 172-5; 1978e: 487; 1990: 102-3).

[9] Marx (1978g: 554-5) recommends adopting the standpoint of the oppressed and dominated struggling for their emancipation. For Marx this is the stance of the working class trying to overcome capitalism. More generally, critical theorists identify tendencies of "intramundane transcendence" (Ng 2015: 395, 401-2), including emancipatory movements of various sorts—such as workers', feminist, LGBTQ+, and environmental social movements. Haslanger (2021b: 28-9) points out, however, that we need not assume that what is claimed by the oppressed or dominated is always true or justified.

Another important insight from Marx is that overcoming ideological errors may require practical besides theoretical operations. Ideological illusions might be generated by certain circumstances just as systematically as optical illusions (Marx 1978d: 154). These illusions will stop arising only after their causes cease to exist, but since the causes do not only involve our cognitive approach to the world but also the complex material and social circumstances in which our cognitions take place, practical efforts to alter those circumstances are necessary: "[T]he call to abandon illusions about [our] condition is a *call to abandon a condition which requires illusions*" (Marx 1978a: 1954). This is arguably part of the message in the famous Thesis XI on Feuerbach.[10] Thus, even if we come to understand that S1-S10 are false, we might remain prone to accept them if we do not change the features of our life that make them seem compelling.

Ideology critique involves a variety of significant and quite difficult tasks. We have to explore the psychological and social mechanisms behind ideological stories such as S1-S10 to understand how they arise and what their effects are. We also have to account for how it is possible for us to become aware of our cognitive defects and improve our ability to lucidly counter them. In addition to these social-scientific and epistemological challenges, there is the normative challenge of articulating and justifying ideas about the good and the right that help us grasp when an ideological story contributes to making things bad or wrong and imagine superior alternatives. These theoretical challenges are interrelated, and are in turn bound up with the more practical challenge of experimenting with activities and institutions that improve our lot. I cannot of course answer all these challenges in this paper. I will concentrate on the normative one, focusing in particular on how well-being may feature in ideology critique. I will address the other challenges only partially and when necessary to develop the two theses of this paper.[11]

2.2. Real Interests

2.2.1. Practical reason has three dimensions. They regard technical, prudential, and moral reasoning. The first identifies effective means to given ends, while the other two articulate appropriate ends. Thus, prudential reasoning works its way from evaluative prudential facts about the agent's well-being—about what is good or beneficial, or bad or detrimental to them—to their choices. The fact that writing poetry benefits me gives me reason to write a poem, the fact that pain is bad for me gives me reason to avoid burning my hand on the stove. Moral reasoning proceeds from moral facts to judgments about what ought to be done. Moral facts are facts about

[10] "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" (Marx 1978c: 145). See also Marx (1978b: 89; 1978d: 164, 169). Recent discussions make related points. Thus, Haslanger explores the tight connections between ideologies and social practices, which are important both for explaining the genesis of ideologies (Haslanger 2021a: 28-36, 38-43; see Althusser 2011: 216-26) and for challenging them (Haslanger 2021a: 50-1). See also Ng (2015: 397, 399-400) on the embeddedness of consciousness in life practices.

[11] For surveys of these challenges, and particular contributions on the epistemological one, see Celikates (2017, 2021) and Haslanger (2021a, 2021b). As mentioned in note 5, Elster surveys mechanisms in cognitive psychology. Wright (2010: 283-6) in turn explores sociological mechanisms underpinning ideology, including control of production and distribution of ideas (e.g. mass media), microprocesses of formation of beliefs and dispositions (e.g. in institutions of socialization such as the family and schools), adaptive preference formation, patterns of affirmation and sanction in everyday life enforcing behavioral expectations, and influential discourses about what is and is not possible. Wright (2010: 311ff.) also illuminates the potential disparity between short-term and long-term harms and benefits. This is important for articulating strategies of social transformation, as we might face the difficulty that some extended processes of change could initially damage many people's material interests before they deliver the significant improvements aimed at.

what is right or just (or wrong or unjust). The fact that it would be right to help that elderly person cross the street gives me reason to do it. The fact that it would be wrong to humiliate that co-worker gives me reason not to do it. Finally, technical reasoning is instrumental reasoning. It explores causal relations between various events, with an eye to identifying, favorably, sequences that lead to final outcomes that are good or right and, apprehensively, chains that lead to outcomes that are bad or wrong.

I am here inspired by Kant's (1996: Ak 4:414-417) view that moral reasoning constrains prudential reasoning, and both moral and prudential reasoning constrain technical reasoning. (I also think, and argued elsewhere that Kant did not fully capture the objective goods tracked by prudential reasoning and their role within moral reasoning (Gilabert 2023a: ch.2; see also Parfit 2011, vol.1: 243, vol.2: 675–677)). Now, a characteristic theme in critical theory is the critique of narrowly instrumental reason, or the view that rationality focuses only on causal relations between possible actions and given ends—ignoring whether the ends themselves are worthy of pursuit. This critique often urges engagement of moral reasoning to ascertain whether our ends and the potential means to achieve them violate the rights of those we might affect with our actions. But this critique should also engage prudential reasoning to identify what is good for us as an end rather than as a means. Realizing this is not only necessary to form a full picture of practical reason, but also to perform critique more lucidly. Since ideology often works through problematic views about well-being, ideology critique must identify better ways to think about it. We should, in other words, illuminate how prudential considerations feature in the contrast between "real" and "apparent" or "false" interests, which is a common staple of critical theory.

2.2.2. What is an interest? Here is a general definition focused on prudential interests. An individual has an interest in some object if and only if that object contributes to their well-being (i.e., is good for them, benefits them, makes them better off). The object of the interest can contribute directly or indirectly to the individual's well-being, depending on whether it is an instance or a part of what is intrinsically good for the individual or is instead (or also) instrumentally good as a means (i.e., it causally contributes to bringing about something else that is intrinsically good). If friendship is intrinsically good for me, I have a direct interest in having friends and spending time with them, and an indirect interest in freeing up time in my schedule so that I can make friends and be with them. (In what follows, unless otherwise indicated, I focus on direct interests.)

We have just defined the *concept* of a prudential interest: an individual has an interest in p if and only if p benefits the individual.[12] This is the concept we use when we say that something "is in someone's interest." But to determine what makes something be in an individual's interest, we need to engage substantive *conceptions* of well-being. There are two kinds of philosophical theories available. *Subjectivist theories* say that something contributes to our well-being if and only if, and because, we have favorable attitudes towards it or is causally relevant for getting something we favor.[13] The paradigmatic subjectivist view focuses on favorable conative attitudes.

[12] Using Fletcher's (2021: 13) helpful terminology, we can then say that the fact that p benefits the individual is an *evaluative prudential fact*. It generates the further, *directive prudential fact* that the individual has *prudential reason* to respond in fitting ways to it. If, and because, having friends benefits me (an evaluative prudential fact), I should make time to be with friends (a directive prudential fact). Fletcher notes that prudential reasons include both reasons for action and reasons to form certain attitudes (such as hoping, or wishing, that beneficial things occur). Parallel points apply to moral facts and reasons.

[13] For the contrast between subjectivism and objectivism, see Lin (2022: 4, 8). There are weaker formulations of subjectivism that state only a necessary condition for prudential value (Dorsey 2021: 80, 110-1).

Thus, according to the desire satisfaction theory, something benefits us if and only if, and because, we desire it or it helps us get something we desire.[14] Having a job we don't want, and which does not help us get something else we want, could not benefit us. By contrast, *objectivist theories* say that some things could be intrinsically good for us independently of whether we have favorable attitudes towards them. We can have a direct interest in an object even if we don't want it (and we can want an object without it being in our interest to get it).

There are several objectivist theories of well-being. For example, objective list theories enumerate some items, such as pleasure, knowledge, achievement, autonomy, and friendship as objective (non-instrumental) goods. To defend hypotheses that some item is indeed an element of well-being belonging to the list, Hooker (2015) proposes that we imagine two possible lives of an individual in which everything is as much as possible the same except for how much the item is present, and ask ourselves whether the life that contains more of the item is more beneficial for the person living it. If the answer is No, then the item does not belongs in the list. If the answer is Yes, we can next inquire what is the right explanation of this life's being more beneficial. A plausible explanation is that the item really is an element of well-being. If rival explanations trying to show that what improves this life is instead the presence of other items are mistaken, then this is the best explanation. So if, and because, a life gives you more pleasant experiences, or in it you manage to overcome challenges to produce significant objects more successfully, etc., you are better off living it.[15]

Another objectivist theory is perfectionism, according to which our life goes well for us as a function of the extent to which we unfold (develop and exercise) our capacities. This theory promises to give a unifying explanation of objective goods—filling a perceived gap in objective list theories. Traditional forms of perfectionism focus on capacities that are constitutive of human nature (Bradford 2016). This leads to difficulties (Fletcher 2016a: ch.4). It is notoriously hard to provide a compelling definition of human nature, as for any proposed constituent feature we will typically find at least one human individual who lacks it. Furthermore, there is no necessary correlation between widely held features and bases for well-being, as some such features might be evaluatively irrelevant or even pernicious. A revised form of perfectionism can avoid these difficulties by stating that an individual's well-being is determined by the features of this individual that are valuable. This statement does not assume that the features must be shared with every other individual, and focuses only on features that are valuable.[16]

If I ponder a version of the Euthyphro question that asks "Is an object good because I want it, or do I (or should I) want it because it is good?", the second possibility strikes me as the correct one. For this reason, I find objectivist theories more plausible than subjectivist theories. I

[14] Heathwood (2016), Sobel (2020). Some subjectivist theories add constraints on the relevant pro-attitudes (e.g. that they be informed). There are other subjectivist theories besides the desire satisfaction theory. On the value fulfillment theory, e.g., something is intrinsically good for us when we value it. "Valuing" here involves more than having a favorable conative attitude. We could desire to smoke without valuing it (Lin 2022: 6-7; Dorsey 2021).

[15] Although they typically include pleasure in the list of intrinsic goods, objective list theories are different from hedonism, which views pleasure as the only intrinsic good. They can claim that two lives with the same net amount of pleasure are not equally beneficial if the individuals living them accrue different net amounts of other goods. This is why objective list theories can avoid the "experience machine" objection levelled at hedonist and other exclusively experiential conceptions. The objection invites us to compare two lives of an individual in which they have the same pleasant experiences (e.g. of spending time with friends). In one of these lives, however, the individual is actually doing what they enjoy, while in the other they are floating in a tank connected to a machine that generates those experiences in their brain. See Nozick (1974: 42-5). For a capacious, non-hedonistic view of happiness, which I think is compatible with an objectivist approach to well-being, see Haybron (2008).

[16] I develop this view in Gilabert (2022).

appreciate subjectivists' insistence on the importance of living in ways that resonate with us. But, although they don't see it as strictly necessary for every gain in well-being, objectivists have room for this resonance. They acknowledge, for example, that enjoyment benefits us, and that full engagement with other objective goods, or the unfolding of valuable capacities, involves cherishing and wanting them. That said, my aim here is not to offer a general defense of objectivism.[17] Instead, I want to note that objectivism is specifically plausible when it comes to understanding the critical theoretical distinction between real and apparent interests. Indeed, if we accept an objectivist view of well-being, it is comparatively easy to make sense of that distinction.[18] *Real interests* are interests whose objects actually are in our interest, while *apparent interests* might or might not match our interests in the objective sense. If we use the distinction in a challenging, critical spirit, to say that an interest is *"merely apparent"* or "*false,"* then we mean that the putative interest fails to match an interest in the objective sense. Some things appear to benefit us but in fact they do not. The point of the contrast is to alert us to the difference between having a favorable attitude towards something and it being good for us.

Subjectivist theories could also try to make sense of the distinction. The explanation could be that apparent interests in something exist when we seem to want it, or it seems to help us get what we want, while real interests exist when we actually want it, or it actually helps us get what we want. Our real interests track the objects of our authentic and informed desires. The possibility of mismatch is understandable because we are not always fully aware of what we want, or know what fulfills our desires. It seems to me, however, that this explanation is not as compelling as the one provided by the objectivists. In particular, it cannot illuminate the fact that when we revise our desires (or other pro-attitudes) and form new ones, we sometimes justify the change by noting that the objects of the latter are (more) beneficial. We think, counter to subjectivist strictures, that these objects had (greater) prudential value even when we did not desire them (or desired them less).

To avoid misunderstandings, notice that I am here focusing on normative uses of the term "interest." These are different from descriptive or empirical uses. The latter surface when we say that someone "takes an interest in" something (which might or might not "be in their interest"). For example, when we say that Tony has an interest in working as a firefighter, we might be making a psychological report about what Tony wants. When we use "interest" in the normative sense, we are saying something about what is prudentially good for Tony. We are not describing Tony's mental states, what he happens to want, but stating what would benefit him and, perhaps, also what he has reason to want. Critical pronouncements about real interests must be able to make claims of the second kind.[19]

I should pause to consider one of the few attempts to explain the distinction between real and apparent interests in critical theory. Geuss (1981: ch.2) outlines two tests: the "perfect knowledge" test saying that your real interests are those you would form if you had full empirical knowledge of your external situation and self-knowledge of what would satisfy you, and the "optimal

[17] Fletcher (2016a: ch.3) surveys good defenses. Sobel (2020) defends subjectivism.

[18] To avoid misunderstanding, notice that the easiness I refer to concerns the distinction between the concepts of real and apparent interests, not the identification of substantive instances of them. As contemporary critical theorists emphasize, the latter task is difficult (see Celikates 2017, 2021, which include historical surveys of the debates). But as I explain later, it should not be avoided, and the methodology of reflective equilibrium can help discharge it appropriately.

[19] Of course, descriptive claims about Tony's interests are relevant in a social-scientific study of his behavior, even if the interests are not normatively sound. As Elster (1986: 173n.16) puts it, such interests, even if not "real", are "actual." Although he marks this important distinction, Elster does not engage contemporary debates on substantive theories of well-being, with their different accounts of what makes interests "real."

conditions" test saying that your real interests are those you would form if you were placed in conditions of freedom—understood as including non-deprivation, non-coercion, and correct information. These tests could converge. Perhaps perfect knowledge can only be achieved in optimal conditions of freedom, and full freedom would include perfect knowledge. Geuss acknowledges that the tests face challenges. The first might yield what strike us as problematic results, as even after gaining perfect knowledge some people could insist in forming monstruous interests. Geuss thinks this challenge smuggles an unduly moralistic view of ideology critique. The second test might in turn seem problematically "utopian," yielding results that are irrelevant for actual people in their current circumstances. But the tests could still be put to good use. For example, the critic could deploy the second test to show that current circumstances are defective and recommend that we move closer to the optimal state. We could be in an intermediate situation in which deprivation, coercion, and ignorance are not so intense that we cannot glimpse at better arrangements. Even if we are also far from an optimal state, we could envision and pursue significant improvements.

Geuss's discussion is illuminating. But for our purposes it has two limitations. First, it does not distinguish between the descriptive and normative senses of "interest." I presume that the interests arising in the favorable conditions of knowledge or freedom would be interests in the normative sense as well as in the descriptive sense, but it is important to be aware of the distinction as the two interests need not always coincide. Second, Geuss's approach is epistemic, and thus does not tell us what makes interests real. That we would "form" an interest under certain favorable conditions might provide us with evidence, or warrant the belief, that we have a real interest in its object, but does not explain in virtue of what the interest is real. The justifications deploying the tests are epistemic but not determinative.[20]

2.2.3. Let us explore an example of ideology critique using the contrast between real and apparent interests. Take the case of alienated labor. According to socialist critics, in capitalism workers face conditions of productive activity in which, to a large extent, they:

- AL1: are dominated by others, such as the bosses under whose direction they must toil; and/or
- AL2: do not control (or even understand) the social process of production, its mechanisms, and results; and/or
- AL3: do not develop and exercise their creative powers and talents, but are instead stuck in unengaging, repetitive, and ultimately stunting schedules of operations; and/or
- AL4: interact with others, such as fellow workers, managers, and customers, in ways that are not supportive and cooperative but which are marked by indifference or even hostility and rapaciousness; and/or
- AL5: do not count among the final aims of production the fulfilling of the needs of fellow human beings, but only the fulfillment of self-centered goals such as subsistence and consumption; and/or
- AL6: do not garner social appreciation or recognition. (Gilabert 2023a: 210)

The critics think that alienated labor is bad for workers. To explain this, they must first identify certain real interests that are frustrated by these practices. They can say, for example, that workers have:

[20] Determinative justifications tell us what makes it the case that certain responses are normatively required, whereas epistemic ones tell us what warrants beliefs that they are (Cullity 2018: 12-4). Alternatively, Geuss's account might be determinative and constitute a version of subjectivism, thus inheriting its problems. See further notes 2, 33, and 37.

- I1: an interest in self-determination, which is thwarted by the domination and lack of control involved in AL1 and AL2;
- I2: an interest in personal development, which is blocked by AL3;
- I3: an interest in mutually supportive cooperation, which is frustrated by AL4.
- I4: an interest in enacting empathy and concern for other people, which is undermined by AL4 and AL5;
- I5: an interest in gaining knowledge of the surrounding world, which is hindered by AL2;
- I6: an interest in forming a positive sense of themselves. This self-identification would include self-esteem and self-respect, but AL6 makes this quite hard. Arguably, the other features of alienated labor indirectly undermine positive self-identification as well.

The critics would next ask: Why do workers accept labor conditions that are problematic in these ways? To answer this question, they can first note some relevant facts in the background of their practices. They could cite general features of a capitalist economy like the following. There is material scarcity such that work is typically necessary to secure any level of well-being. Ownership of the means of production is largely private and concentrated in the hands of capitalists. Workers own their labor power, but cannot access means of subsistence and other necessary goods without selling it to capitalists employers, who will own what they produce and sell it for profit. To maximize profit in a competitive environment, capitalists tend to direct production in such a way that workers' activities display AL1-AL6. There is also competition among workers to get and maintain employment. On the other hand, capitalists and workers recognize their group interests and engage in collective action, forming business associations and trade unions to improve their lot, especially when they face more intense conflicts with each other as they shape the terms on which they interact. Bargaining and disputes reach the wider political process. Social movements, cultural outlets, political parties, and other forms of collective agency are used by capitalists and workers to influence how the government regulates their economic positions and activities. Given their greater economic power, however, capitalists typically have more influence in this process.

This rough and stylized picture of background conditions (which could of course be spelled out in much more detail) would lead us to conclude that, although not powerless, workers are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to setting the terms on which they work. Now, critics will also have to explore ideological mechanisms to understand how a social order that exhibits AL1-AL6 and problematically frustrates interests such as I1-I6 is reproduced. Here stories such as S1-S10 come into play. Thus, S1 might convince workers that they face capitalists as their equals. S7 might lead them to hope that they will eventually be much better off than they are now if they apply themselves and carry on. When they face hardship in the short term—working long hours on unfulfilling tasks and in toxic social conditions—they can embrace S5 and adopt a positive attitude to make their daily lives less unpleasant or hopeless. If none of this suffices to reconcile themselves to their predicament, they can still, if reluctantly, accept the inequalities they find in their society by adopting some version of S6. A more egalitarian society might be desirable, but is not really feasible. After all, as S3 says, people simply are selfish. Regulating inequalities somewhat so that the less advantaged don't do too badly is all that can be realistically envisioned. Or, more cynically, workers can accept S2 and think that more egalitarian or solidaristic proposals are not even desirable—they would level everyone down and crush their life-affirming spirit. Additionally, they can be moved by S8 and think that, instead of complaining, they should buckle up and contribute to the social product they draw from to survive. If they do not receive much of it and achieve little self-realization in their working activities this might be, as S4 says, largely

their own fault. And why should they expect much from work anyway? They can just work for a salary, and follow S10 to seek self-determination and self-realization in other activities instead of pressing for reforms of working practices.

Since we are able to reflectively discover our real interests, and often do so, it is important to point out that defenders of the ideological stories sometimes address those interests, but package reference to them in a way that bends our understanding of their fulfillment to sustain a social order that does not optimally serve them. In response to critical challenges, defenders of the status quo can allege that there is no alternative form of work giving greater fulfillment of the interests that is both feasible to generate for all and such that each can claim access to it as a right. An ideological package can then arise telling workers, for example, that they should accept alienated labor because it allows them to subsist (which meets an interest to add to the list, I7), that it is chosen rather than coercively imposed on them like slave labor (meeting I1), that it helps them further the needs of their family and allows them to do their part in sustaining the life of the society on which they depend (serving I3 and I4), and that it enables them to avoid the shame and guilt of being free-riders while also providing an occasion to experience self-worth by acquiring beneficial positions after winning in competition with others (catering for I3 and I6). As the last point illustrates, ideological stories can simultaneously draw on, and intensify, existing motivations that are different from I1-I7, such as the tendency to compete and construe one's self-worth on the basis of competitive victories. This outlook might, for example, portray competitive triumph as a real interest (recall S2). Or it might misleadingly present its search as a way to service the real interest I6. Critics of ideology would then have to challenge these additional motives and show that, although psychologically powerful, they reflect apparent rather than real interests. They would have to show that, overall, the ideological package furnishes workers insufficient fulfillment of their real interests, as it either ignores some of these interests or misleadingly engages them in a partial or distorted fashion.

Ideological stories thus tend to stabilize conditions of alienated labor by convincing us that they are unavoidable, or deserved, or all things considered desirable. Real interests (such as I1-I7), can be engaged in this form of work, and ideological stories would typically mention them. The critics will reply that this engagement of real interests is insufficient or even insidiously manipulative. But to complete their response, the critics must help us imagine alternative social arrangements that make greater fulfillment of real interests accessible.

To do this, critics could first note that conditions have changed in history in ways that have improved workers' experience. The 21st-century capitalist firm in advanced economies is different from what Marx encountered. It sometimes (although certainly not always) includes HR departments, childcare facilities, staff training, mandatory pensions, conflict between management and stock-holders, concern for a wider group of "stake-holders," and pursuit of a "social license" from the community to do business. Furthermore, over the 20th century some stringent regulations on the capitalist economy were introduced—facilitating unionization, collective bargaining, co-determination, and other forms of empowerment that enabled workers to shape labor practices in more favorable ways. Changes like these (which are however now under threat in the wake of neoliberal policies) show that we are not mere puppets of ideology. We can push back and obtain improvements.[21]

[21] We should avoid the elitist thesis that people are thoroughly captive of ideological pictures and cannot identify their real interests. Furthermore, the stability of capitalism greatly depends on its class structure, which makes it very hard for workers to pursue collective action. Given their lack of control of productive assets and wealth, the threat of being fired, the costs of organizing, and the risk that others will free ride, it can be rational for workers, at least in the short

Critics could, more profoundly, ask us to entertain the radically different background conditions of a democratic socialist society.[22] These would include reduced material scarcity, real opportunities to create firms that are democratically managed by workers, an enhancement of workers' effective control of their labor power (for example through a universal basic income that gives them real freedom to choose when, where, and how much to work), and reduced competition to access certain important goods (for example, by providing—or increasing the existing provision of—health care unconditionally to all, independently of labor income). The critics could explore the hypothesis that, in these new conditions, AL1-AL6 would be much less present, and I1-I7 would be met to a greater extent, than in contemporary capitalist conditions. If this hypothesis proves correct, then it would also be possible to conclude (at least with respect to the matters considered) that we would be better off if we made institutional changes moving our societies in the direction of the alternative conditions. This would be an argument for the prudential desirability of the changes. It could and should be coupled with arguments showing that the changes are also morally defensible. The moral arguments could for example point out that fostering people's access to the conditions of their well-being in the proposed ways would involve a reasonable implementation of a general duty to arrange our social life so that everyone has equal and effective chances to flourish, or pursue their self-realization, and to do so on terms they individually and collectively determine as fitting for them. The proposed changes would enact the kind of solidaristic empowerment we owe to each other as persons with dignity.

The foregoing considerations regarding the prudential and moral desirability of certain social transformations should be combined with arguments showing their feasibility. This is necessary to fully vindicate the critics' core complaint that the ideological views they are challenging help stabilize social arrangements in which people are worse off than they *could and should* be. To do this, critics could point out that existing (like past) social conflicts already hint at people's willingness to contest their current predicament, and that the alternative social configurations would not require resources they cannot generate or institutions and cultural norms they are unable to sustain over time. These feasibility arguments can appeal, for example, to the potential of new technologies for reducing drudgery and enabling more rewarding work. Perhaps story S9, although false, can be interpreted as responding to workers' yearning to work as free and equal partners. Similarly, S10 could be a symptom of discomfort with existing working practices which could be more fully assuaged through deep changes of them. We could move beyond S10 by pointing out that an economy enabling everyone to flourish would not be feasible without work, that it would be unlikely for most people to achieve enough fulfillment of their real interests outside of work, and that productive activities can be transformed so that they are not only less time-consuming but also internally more appealing (thus allowing people to more effectively pursue the goods they need both outside and inside work).[23]

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term, to pursue instead individualized strategies to advance their well-being. Chibber (2022: ch.3) forcefully makes these points, with which I agree. Chibber also says that ideology is still a significant, albeit casually dependent, factor in explaining the stabilization of capitalism. It furnishes "a means for actors to rationalize their location" in the class structure (Ibid: 112). For example, workers "naturalize" the class structure to view it as unchangeable (and capitalists view it as also desirable (112-3)). However, notice that even if people are not thoroughly in the grip of "false consciousness" (112), there must be some falsity in their attitudes, as social structures are in fact changeable (and arguably capitalists'—and some workers'—views about their desirability include moral and/or prudential errors). Ideology critique remains an important intellectual resource to correct these mistakes and generate more rational (feasible and overall desirable) proposals of social organization.

[22] See Gilabert and O'Neill (2024: sect.4) for a survey of socialist proposals.

[23] This complements Bousquet's (2023) agenda of reducing alienation by limiting work.

2.3. Reflective Equilibrium

2.3.1. We can distinguish two levels of inquiry in ideology critique. There is a first-order level within which we investigate what is good, what is right, and their determinative grounds. We engaged this level in the previous section when we explored the claims that alienated labor is bad for us, that interests in it are false, that partaking in alternative forms of work that involve more self-determination and self-realization would be more beneficial, that our real interests (e.g. those regarding I1-I7) would be better served in those alternative forms of work, and that we have a moral right to access such better conditions.

There is then a higher, meta-normative level within which we can explore the status or nature of our first-order normative claims. Here we join metaphysical disputes on whether our normative claims can be true or false, whether they are responsive to attitude-independent prudential or moral facts, and whether the statements about these facts are reducible to empirical reports of the kind produced by natural and social science or are instead sui generis. Although I will make some remarks on these issues in this paper,[24] I will focus here on another domain of meta-normative inquiry, which is epistemological. What is an appropriate epistemic justification of our beliefs about the good and the right, and of the critical beliefs that ideological stories are problematic when they lead people to accept forms of life that are not as good as they could and should be?

2.3.2. I submit that the method of reflective equilibrium, construed in a certain way, is an appropriate approach to epistemic justification in our area of inquiry. In general, the method says that our beliefs in normative principles (such as principles about what makes actions or institutions right or activities contributive to well-being) are epistemically justified when they fit into a coherent set of beliefs that also includes our considered judgments (at all levels of generality) about the issues the principles apply to and any theoretical views that are relevant for this application (such as those resulting from social science). Considered judgments are those we form in favorable conditions of inquiry involving the ability, opportunity, and desire to make a correct decision. The principles accommodate, explain, and could extend our considered judgments. Coherence among our various beliefs is an ideal, which we often do not reach. So, when they do not fit together, we can for example revise principles to fit considered judgments about cases or revise the latter to match otherwise well-supported principles. The method instigates an ongoing, fallibilistic process of reflection. Our beliefs are justified to the extent that they survive this process. Any achieved equilibrium is revisable, as new evidence and argument might lead us to correct our views and seek new equilibria. First proposed by Rawls, this method is now common currency in ethics and political philosophy (Daniels 2016; Knight 2023).

It may be surprising to propose this method in the context of ideology critique. It has been subjected to challenges that seem to reveal that it is unfit for that task. It is common to worry that an individual's reflective equilibrium might rely on judgments that reflect their biases and prejudices. It has also been pointed out that some versions of the method that prohibit reference to controversial sources may be too deferential to the status-quo (Haslanger 2021b: 34n15), and that when engaging in normative reasoning it is not always a good idea to bracket a belief when one is personally invested in its truth, as when one is a person of color and holds the reasonable belief that persons of color should not be disadvantaged on the basis of their skin color (McGrath 2021: 225).

[24] I endorse the normative realist approach to them offered by Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014).

If interpreted and developed in certain ways, the method can nonetheless be fit for the task of ideology critique. First, we can deploy a "radical" rather than a "conservative" version of it (Knight 2023: sect.1.4). Instead of taking our initial considered judgments as fixed, we can view them as overridable in the process of reflection. As pointed out by Scanlon (2003, 2014: 76-84), our aim when using the method should be *deliberative* rather than descriptive—i.e. to figure out what *to* believe rather than to report what we already believe. What is key here is not so much the end-state of coherence, but the process of reflection, which can involve revision of any initial views (Knight 2023: sect. 3.1).

When we use the method to justify our views about how to live together, we can envision it as deliberative in a second way, as involving an *intersubjective* performance in which we try to reach common ideas (Gilabert 2023a: 150-7). The various standpoints from which we start our reflection can echo our experiences as members of various groups—such as those concerning class, gender, or race. The search for reflective equilibrium can in fact invite the engagement of these different perspectives to reveal their insights, while also allowing us to process their contents to avoid a dogmatic assumption that they could not involve blind spots or mistakes. The final court of appeal in epistemic justification would be reflective assent by all agents affected. In practice this aim may be hard to achieve fully, but it could remain as an ideal worth trying to approximate as we improve our social life, which includes enhancing the procedures through which we identify and justify to each other the terms on which we structure it (I will return to this point in 3.4).

So we can after all articulate the search for deliberative reflective equilibrium as a *critical endeavor* in which we are prepared to contest received views about how societies work and should work. We acknowledge that these views might turn out to be false and that they might have been used to legitimize arrangements that fail to benefit people as much as is possible and desirable, or that they problematically benefit some at the expense of others.[25] We see the search as fallibilistic and open-ended. We are prepared to revise our beliefs and reach new equilibria in view of new experiences, social-scientific knowledge, and discovered tensions among our normative judgments. This is important for ideology critique, as some of our intuitions might indeed be automatic, knee-jerk reactions that reflect prejudices shaped by our socialization in a culture aligned with prevalent patterns of alienation, exploitation, and domination. They might themselves be ideological. What counts as "common sense" is historically generated, and ideology critique can unsettle current instances of it and help generate other, hopefully better configurations.[26] In fact, some devices of critical theory (such as immanent critique, discussed in 3.3), some initially controversial claims of social theory, and the contributions of a variety of agents (including those in minorities) should be welcome to develop the method of reflective equilibrium to make it more sharply attuned to the difficulties that we face in forming justified views in problematic social conditions.

To illustrate, we might initially be enthused by ideological stories such as S1-S10, but then discover, as we engage in ethical and political reflection on their application to various situations while drawing on our diverse experiences and the best social science and efforts in critical theory,

[25] Rawls's (2001: 29-32) proposal already includes elements of this critical attitude. It characterizes reflective equilibrium as "wide" and "general," noting that reflection should engage alternative conceptions and involve intersubjective besides personal reasoning. Echoing Marx, Rawls (2001: 4, 79, 121-2) also urges that we check whether our normative reflection relies on ideological assumptions. As Daniels (2016: sect.3) points out, reflective equilibrium can also be wide by engaging relevant scientific research. A congenial view of how to combine normative philosophical reflection and empirical scientific inquiry to build "mid-level" theories of well-being is offered in Alexandrova (2017).

[26] Relevant here is Gramsci's (2000: ch.XI) account of common sense as a "hegemonic cultural construction."

that a society shaped by them is problematic. We realize that we have interests (such as I1-I7) that are not well-served in this society, and go on to imagine alternative arrangements that are more aligned with them. In the process, we revise what we took to be in our interest, and reach more justified views about how to live together. In this reflection, we come to accept the two theses of this paper, viz. that our critical assessments of society should engage considerations of well-being, and that the interests those considerations should be based on are best understood with an objectivist approach that distinguishes between what we want and what is good for us and tries to orient the former towards the latter.

3. Issues in Critical Theory

I now proceed to show that the approach proposed in the previous section has illuminating implications for the exploration of important issues in critical theory concerning well-being and ideology critique. The approach facilitates the explicit articulation of considerations about the good and their proper combination with concerns about the right. The argument builds up to the contention that substantive objectivist claims about well-being can and should be advanced without a relapse into an authoritarian outlook that neglects the crucial value of self-determination.

3.1. The Good and the Right

Well-being is important for ideology critique. Interestingly, Geuss (1981: 76) adds to the desiderata of "knowledge" and "freedom" mentioned above (2.1.3) another regarding "satisfaction." Ideology critique counters not only "delusion" and "bondage" but also "frustration." The kinds of enlightenment and emancipation that matter include (inter alia) those enhancing our ability to pursue well-being. The link between ideology critique and well-being was also explicit in early formulations of the project of critical theory.[27] But it has come out of focus in more recent developments. One reason for this could be the fear that focusing on well-being etiolates the distinction between morality and prudence, and thus detracts from the primary goal of critical theory, which is the moral one of challenging injustice.

I pointed out (in 2.2.1) that the three dimensions of practical reason are structurally ordered, so that when we form all things considered judgments about what to do or what institutions to build or maintain, technical reasons are constrained by prudential and moral reasons, and prudential reasons are constrained by moral reasons. This last point is crucial. It could be, for example, that some tyrannical and abusive bosses would in some respects be worse off after reforms in the

[27] Horkheimer's (1972) characterization of the better or more just society in his classical essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" depicts it as more rational and freer. It would exhibit "reasonable conditions of life" (p. 219), "planful decision and rational determination of goals" (p. 207), and sociality that enacts "real democracy and partnership" (p. 250) and makes "self-determination" paramount (pp. 229, 233). But Horkheimer also contrasts "a fragmented society in which material and ideological power operates to maintain privileges and an association of free men in which each has the same possibility of self-development" (p. 219), and claims that "critical theory" has "the happiness of all individuals as its goal" (p.248). Marcuse's (2009) article "On Hedonism" offers another, paradigmatic example. It states an explicit contrast between true and false interests (pp. 126, 136, 141-3), and construes critical theory as helping us reject the latter to facilitate fulfillment of the former. People can achieve an "autonomous recognition of their true interests" (p. 145) and create a "more rational and happy society" (p.133). This society would implement the Marxian principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs!" (pp. 136-7). Critical theory operates with an ideal of "freedom" as the "fulfillment of all developed potentialities" (p. 145). The "rational self-administration of the whole in which the subject participates actively" (pp. 146, 145) goes hand in hand with "knowledge" and "happiness" (pp. 143-9).

organization of workplaces prevent them from continuing to humiliate their workers. But this loss of well-being on their part does not make the new arrangements all things considered incorrect. They would foster the well-being of the workers more than they reduce the well-being of the bosses, and, crucially, they would be a morally defensible way of reorganizing production.[28] This remark clarifies further the point made in 2.2.3 that ideology critique is based on considerations about how well people could and should be. The "should" here includes prudential and moral considerations, with the latter having priority.

So my view is that although they are independent, the right constrains the good.[29] I believe that, at the level of fundamental principles, the normativity of morality is self-standing and has supremacy. But I also want to highlight the contribution of the good in the downstream articulation of moral requirements. When duly constrained, well-being is indeed important for specific moral norms. Since people have reason to pursue their well-being, and since we morally owe to them respect and concern, supporting their search for well-being must be part of what is involved in treating them appropriately.[30] Take paradigmatic ideas of justice such as freedom, equality, and community. Without a view of well-being, even a relatively thin and general one, we cannot give content to them so that specific rights and duties can be stated. We must ask: Freedom from what and to do or be what? Equality of access to what? Community in the mutual provision of what? Views about what would contribute to people's well-being would help us answer these questions, and no answer to them that ignores well-being would be complete or sufficiently action-guiding. Prudential considerations are also important to articulate the normative critiques of domination, exploitation, and alienation, all of which impose systemic obstacles on people's access to some of the means and constituents of their well-being.[31]

To be complete, a conception of social justice should also explore issues of feasibility about the likely stability of a society framed by its principles once it is created, and about the accessibility of it if it doesn't already exist but is the goal of social transformation (Gilabert 2023: ch.4). A key dimension of feasibility is motivation. The question here is what is likely to move people to act in tune with the norms of justice. To handle this question, it is important to distinguish between reasons in the operative sense and reasons in the normative sense (Scanlon 1998: 18-9). Our focus is on the former—i.e., the reasons that people take as relevant and which in fact move them to act as they do, whether they are also the reasons they ought to recognize or act on or not. Now, it

[28] It would also in certain respects benefit the bosses, allowing them to unfold rather than repress their valuable capacities for empathy, concern, and mutually supportive cooperation, and enjoy the intrinsic and instrumental goods flowing from their exercise.

[29] I agree here with Parfit (2011: vol.1, sect.36).

[30] This seems to be assumed in Forst's (2011) discussion on the distinction between "ethics" and "morality" when it says that "morality is about a sphere of categorically binding norms whose observance is not required for the sake of *one's own* good, but is *unconditionally* required for the sake of the good of *others* according to the criteria of reciprocity and generality" (p. 74). The independent moral strictures of generality and reciprocity command that we frame our practical reasoning in ways that give every person we could affect their due, not just ourselves. But when figuring out what we owe to others, considering how we might benefit or harm them, and therefore what is good for them, also play a role. Similarly, the principle of universalization in Habermas's discourse ethics urges that we accept norms after considering their expected impact on "the satisfaction of the interests of *each individual*" (Habermas 1990: 93). In moral discourse, those affected "clarify, from the perspective of participants in practical deliberation, what is equally good for all" (Habermas, 1998: 30).

[31] A conception of justice can for example state that people have equal rights to the highest feasible level of opportunity or freedom to effectively and fairly pursue their well-being. Cohen's (2011) account of "equality of access to advantage" presents a view of this kind. The Dignitarian Approach I propose in Gilabert (2023a) offers a similar account, and explains that people's rights relate to their good by supporting their interests in unfolding the valuable capacities at the basis of their dignity.

might be said that prudential judgments do not provide solid, reliable motivating reasons, whereas moral judgments are more robust motivators. Some people might be motivated to engage in social transformation because they do not feel well in the current society, and expect to be better off in a more just one. But even if well-being seems in this way to be relevant for accessibility, it might not be so when it comes to stability. Once transformation has taken place, people could relapse into self-centered attitudes, and seek their own advantage in a way that undermines the maintenance of the new arrangement. Such attitudes may actually affect accessibility as well. The privileged in the current, unjust society will oppose social transformation, thinking that it would make them worse off. And the oppressed may be risk-averse, or reluctant to engage in collective action instead of free-riding on the risky efforts of others. These weaknesses regarding prudential judgments seemingly do not arise when it comes to moral judgments, which appear to provide more robust reasons to move to a more just society and to stay in it, and apply impartially to all agents. Motivation should be built on them rather than on prudential reasons.

This worry is important. But it does not debunk engagement of prudential judgments in the pursuit of social justice. First, since social justice would cater for everyone's opportunities to effectively pursue their well-being, prudential considerations are not totally disconnected from what justice requires. I acknowledge, however, that prudential and moral considerations could conflict in people's actual psychological processes of decision-making. I agree that at this point directly moral considerations should be engaged, and cultivated in a way that gives them priority. But neglecting prudential judgments would be disastrous for the feasibility of progressive social change. Motivation built exclusively on moral considerations is psychologically rare. Many people are unlikely to partake in the arduous process of social change and support a new, more just society, exclusively on those considerations, if well-being is not also catered for. Only a few moral heroes would proceed in this way. Furthermore, if their heroism is built on neglect for well-being, there is a risk that they will shape the goals of social transformation in morally problematic ways (by ignoring that justice must foster the social conditions of well-being), and approach the process of change itself in ways that are hectoring and insensitive—and thus also likely to be ineffective. Cultivating motivational paths that highlight moral considerations is appropriate, but overlooking their entanglement with judgements about well-being is not.

3.2. Assessing Critical Pronouncements

With this understanding of the normative standpoint of critical theory in the background, we can explore how best to assess critical pronouncements about ideology as we search for reflective equilibrium. We should distinguish at least four terms of assessment:

Truth: Are the contents of the pronouncements true? Do they reflect the relevant empirical, prudential, and moral facts?

Epistemic Justification: Are the critics justified in holding their critical views? Would those whose views are challenged be justified in adopting them as well?

Fitting Address: Does making the pronouncements express an attitude towards the people whose views are criticized that is appropriately considerate? Or is it condescending, unduly intrusive, uncaring, neglectful, and so on?

Effectiveness: How likely are the pronouncements to motivate people to act differently?

Critical pronouncements could be challenged along any of these axes as false, unjustified, inconsiderate, or ineffective. These charges can arise simultaneously and strengthen each other. But they are logically independent. Critics' pronouncements may be true but not justified. They

may be true and justified but presented in a disrespectful way. They may be true, justified, and considerate but fail to motivate the recipient. They may be motivating but false. And so on.

We should identify, for the relevant situations, what are the appropriate ways to honor the four desiderata, and try to combine them. As I go on to discuss, however, this pursuit is not without difficulties, and the differences between the four desiderata should not be papered over.

3.3. Types of Critique

The distinction between the desiderata of Truth, Epistemic Justification, Fitting Address, and Effectiveness helps us explore the prospects and limitations of different structures of social criticism. We can use Jaeggi's (2018: chs. 5-6) illuminating classification, which, in a nutshell, identifies the following structures:

- In general, *social criticism* typically involves (1) challenging a set of practices P by noting that it conflicts with a set of norms N.
- The approach of *internal criticism* adds to (1) that (2) criticism concentrates on norms that are already accepted by participants in the practices assessed, and recommends that they change P to meet what N (thus understood, as a set of internal norms) requires.
- The approach of *external criticism* adds to (1) that (3) criticism concentrates on norms that are true, or correct, independently of whether they are already accepted by the participants in the practices assessed, and recommends that they change P to meet what N (thus understood, as a set of external norms) requires.
- Finally, the approach of *immanent criticism* offers a more indirect, or formal proposal. It outlines a procedure agents can use to identify appropriate norms rather than a direct, substantive statement of them. It adds to (1) that (4) criticism involves a diagnostic analysis that shows that the set P and the set N (understood as a set of internal norms) do not only conflict but also partially align with each other and harbor conflicts within themselves, so that the situation featuring them is systematically prone to crises, and recommends a transformation of the situation that overcomes the crises. The process of transformation involves changing both P and N, generating a novel configuration with new sets P* and N*. N* is here also understood as a set of internal norms, but these are the norms agents come to accept in the process of grappling with the crisis generated by N, which they come to abandon. This transformation is a supersession (*Aufhebung*) of the previous configuration, and is rational when and because it involves a learning process in which agents develop their views through an enriched and more differentiated reflection on their problematic situation.

Jaeggi discards the approach of external criticism as potentially domineering or paternalistic (when used to judge the practices of others) or as simply chimeric (when used to criticize one's own). I will discuss the former problem in 3.4. The latter problem arises because we are unable to formulate and adopt any standard of criticism without occupying our own perspective. The internal criticism approach is also rejected, fundamentally because of its tendency towards conventionalism and conservativism. If critique is essentially a call to be more consistent with our existing commitments, it is impossible to lucidly call into question those commitments themselves.[32] Immanent criticism is Jaeggi's preferred approach. It avoids the infeasible project of

[32] Jaeggi primarily directs this challenge to Walzer's (1993) account of internal criticism. But it seems that Honneth's account of immanent critique, which centers on proposing alternative (more inclusive) interpretations of existing social norms, faces similar difficulties. See Jaeggi (2018: 355n.5, 360n.25); Honneth (2017).

adopting a side-way's view on our own practices, and it illuminates our abilities to radically challenge our commitments and to rationally generate better ones.

I agree with Jaeggi's assessment of internal criticism. We can add that internal criticism might sometimes be quite successful in catering for the desiderata of Effectiveness and Fitting Address, but fails to appropriately track the independence of Truth and Epistemic Justification. Consider ideological story S1, which denies that capitalists dominate workers by alleging that they face each other as free and equal bargainers in the labor market. S1 can be subject to an internal critique showing that capitalists and workers are in fact very unequal in their bargaining power and that, to fulfill the ideal of shaping economic activity on the basis of free and equal bargaining, deep changes in the capitalist economy would be needed. However, whether the ideal invoked is itself true, and its justification, remain separate issues. The ideal itself could in some ways be defective, for example by ignoring the predicament of people who, because of some personal disabilities, will always be at a disadvantage in bargaining with more capable agents. Its justification cannot simply be that people happen to endorse it.

I also agree that immanent criticism can be very powerful in discovering contradictions and prompting people to rethink their predicament. Take ideological story S2, which praises competitive individualism. The goal of gaining self-esteem on the basis of winning over others cannot be consistently fulfilled in a generalized way. There must be losers if there are to be winners, and it seems unrealistic for a society to create enough significant competitions that allow everyone to be a winner in at least one. A society shaped by S2 is bound to be unstable and prone to crises. Immanent criticism can help us understand this and spur the search for alternative (more solidaristic) frameworks to support our self-esteem (Gilabert 2023b). Or consider S9 and S10. Workers are sometimes simultaneously told that they should see work as a medium of freedom and self-realization and that jobs are mere means to get goods external to them. This might reveal the difficulty of successfully fulfilling our various interests within the current organization of labor practices and prompt us to explore alternative arrangements.

The immanent criticism approach has serious limitations, however. It is not fully clear on how to cater for the four desiderata for critical pronouncements, and taking it as the only relevant approach would mistakenly downplay direct engagement with substantive claims about the good and the right. Let me illustrate these difficulties.

First, it is not clear how immanent criticism relates to the desideratum of Truth. Immanent criticism would fail if it were presented as accounting for it, for it would then be vulnerable to a version of the Euthyphro question (Is a norm correct because I come to accept it in critical reflection, or do I (or should I) come to accept it because it is correct?). Pressed by this question, we would have to choose between relapsing into the kind of relativism that rendered internal criticism unacceptable or recognize the existence of objective substantive reasons. On reflection, we gravitate towards the second alternative. After all, when we engage in the enriched reflection urged by the procedure of immanent criticism, and move from accepting norms N to accepting norms N*, we think we are discovering certain reasons that explain why this move is correct, not drifting arbitrarily from one outlook to another, or making new beliefs true just by having them. Part of the point of the procedure is precisely to help us grasp those procedure-independent reasons.[33]

[33] The recognition of external substantive reasons is also missed in Geuss's (1981: 62-5, 94-5) otherwise illuminating discussion of two procedures in critical theory: a contextualist or historicist one of internal or immanent critique and a quasi-transcendental (Habermasian) one invoking general conditions of free and egalitarian communication. They are also vulnerable to Euthyphro-style questions.

A charitable interpretation of the proceduralist stance of immanent criticism is that it is concerned with Epistemic Justification, not Truth. But if this is so, then a view of critical theory centered on it is incomplete, as we want to know how to understand the latter as well. Furthermore, it is not clear that immanent criticism would be an alternative to the method of reflective equilibrium (as articulated in 2.3). It can be seen as one—certainly fruitful—way in which that method could be developed.[34] I thus agree with Jaeggi that immanent criticism can help us unblock our learning processes, and with Celikates (2017, 2021) that an engagement of procedures of the kind involved in it helps unfold our critical capacities. But there are others. Some normative proposals could be justified even if they do not emerge from the diagnosis of contradictions in our society.[35] A process of reflection might instead attest to their inherent normative plausibility and their salutary practical implications.

It is important to note that immanent criticism is not presented only as a method of epistemic justification. It is also defended as an emancipatory intellectual practice through which agents enact self-determination.[36] A consequence of this point is that the approach is not formalistic after all (or is not completely so), as self-determination is a substantive normative idea. Substantive normative commitments also seem to be involved, more specifically, when immanent critics identify the set of agents they wish to address. They typically choose to engage and develop the standpoint of some social movements or groups rather than others. They address, say, feminists or leftist union activists rather than advocates of white supremacism or neofascists. It is hard to understand this choice unless it reflects substantive commitments that are aligned with the aims of the former groups but conflict with those of the latter.

If the recommendation and use of immanent criticism involves substantive normative commitments, then it is a good idea to engage them more systematically and in detail, and to explore their truth and determinative justification or explanation. The method of reflective equilibrium can help with these tasks, as it acknowledges that substantive considerations are crucial at all levels of practical reasoning. The exploration will have to keep track of the distinction between the desiderata of Truth and Epistemic Justification.[37] It will also have to address differences and relations regarding the other desiderata (Effectiveness and Fitting Address). Tensions might arise when attending to them, and substantive normative considerations will be crucial in understanding these tensions and in formulating lucid responses. I turn to these issues in 3.4.

Before proceeding, however, I point out that the idea of external criticism should be explored more charitably. In particular, since Jaeggi downplays the distinction between the epistemic and the metaphysical dimensions in critical theorizing (focusing only on "epistemic truth" (2018: 214)), she fails to notice that we could accept externalism regarding the latter while using

[34] Interestingly, Jaeggi (2018: 308) characterizes the reflection her approach calls for as "an ongoing process of achieving reflective equilibrium."

[35] Novakovic (2019: sect. 3).

[36] Jaeggi (2018: 30-1, 312) explicitly links immanent criticism with collective self-determination and emancipation.

[37] This applies to what Geuss (1981: 78) calls "the 'principle of internal criticism'", according to which "[the] agents themselves [to whom a critical theory is addressed] must be the final judges of whether or not they are being coerced or whether or not they are free." This principle serves as an epistemic devise to confirm or disconfirm a critical theory that proposes a certain social order as emancipating a certain set of agents. Being an epistemic devise, it is consistent with the claim that although the reflective assent by the agents warrants acceptance of the theory, it is not what makes the theory true. Instead, what makes the theory true (if it is) is what the reflection of the agents must track or figure out, which might be, for example, the empirical, prudential, and moral reasons to reorganize their society in ways that provide optimal (feasible and desirable) opportunities to enact their self-determination and self-realization.

something like immanent critique regarding the former. We could think that there are reasons whose cogency does not depend on our acceptance of them and acknowledge that we cannot jump outside of ourselves as we search for them. It should be added that a sensible objectivist view can recognize that the cogency of some of agents' normative reasons depends on what these agents are like.[38] If we are assessing ideological story S10, for example, we must explore how the people involved can flourish within and outside work given their capacities and their material and social environment.[39]

It might be objected that endorsing an objectivist approach makes no difference. Since we cannot adopt a God's eye viewpoint, we cannot have a pure grasp of the normative facts and compare them with our normative attitudes and tell which of the latter correspond to the former. So the truth of objectivism, if it is a truth, is a wheel that turns no mechanism. However, an objectivist outlook is not idle. It can help us be more open to learning. If subjectivism were correct, then it could not be false that something is good for us if we happen to authentically desire or value it. But surely there are cases in which we change our mind as to what to desire or value, and think that these changes involve revising a normative mistake. Such a sense of the possibility of progress in our attitudes only makes sense if objectivism is correct. Once we see this point, we are more likely to be humble and open to revise our views in the face of new evidence or challenges by others, and to actually seek them out to improve our normative knowledge. By contrast, subjectivism seems dogmatic. It can even work as an ideological attitude, facilitating complacency and adaptation to social circumstances that are problematic. "I am doing what I want" would mechanically silence any objection. It can also cement fantastic forms of voluntarism. Our predicament would become unproblematic if we simply decided to approach it in a positive way, by coming to want it to be as it is (as S5 suggests, for example).

3.4. The "Critical Dilemma" and Self-determination

I mentioned in 3.1 the conceptual distinction between normative and motivating reasons. I also accept a substantive claim—sometimes referred to as "externalism" about practical reasons—according to which being motivating is not a necessary condition for something to be a cogent normative reason.[40] It is true, however, that critical theory aims at the formulation of both kinds of reasons. Recall that we are aiming not only at Truth and Epistemic Justification, but also at Effectiveness. The latter must engage motivating reasons. Furthermore, the emancipatory perspective calls for forms of interaction, including that between critics and their interlocutors, which are respectful and enact Fitting Address.

The difficulties of this endeavor surface sharply if we consider the so-called "Critical Dilemma." As Haslanger articulates it, the dilemma arises for views in critical theory that challenge conditions of social injustice and aim to "motivate and guide social change." The horns are these:

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[38] See Scanlon (2014: 93-5).

[39] Critical theorists typically rely on views about what people are like, which are compatible with a great deal of contextual variation See e.g. Marx (1990: 290) on general features of a labor process. Ng (2015) proposes an interesting account of immanent critique that relies on a "formal anthropology" identifying general facts about human agents, and recommends unblocking some general conditions of human freedom. This account is not completely formal, however, as the general facts and conditions it focuses on are not only described but also evaluatively praised. See also Heller's (2018) discussion of the idea of needs in Marx, which identifies relatively general dimensions as well as contextually variable configurations, and illuminates its dual descriptive and evaluative nature.

[40] On both points, see Scanlon (1998) and Parfit (2011).

(a) When criticizing a certain practice, social criticism might rely on "a set of 'external' imported values." The problem here, in Honneth's words, is that "any 'strong,' context-transcending form of social criticism necessarily brings the risk of paternalism or even despotism."
(b) Alternatively, social criticism might "rely on the locally entrenched value horizon" of participants in the practice. The problem then, however, is that "it is unclear that one will have the resources to break through the grip of ideology."[41]

This dilemma has different aspects. I concentrate on its normative dimension.[42] In particular, I claim that the approach proposed in this paper, with its two theses urging explicit engagement with substantive issues about well-being (as well as morality) and favoring an objectivist take on them, can avoid the worries mentioned in the two horns of the dilemma. Regarding the second horn, recall that the approach rejects subjectivism about fundamental prudential and moral principles. So it does not require any "internal" type of critique that implies conventionalism and relativism—which are forms of subjectivism. In their critical and deliberative pursuit of reflective equilibrium, people can challenge any existing normative belief, however entrenched (and this includes, of course, ideological views).

The approach proposed is not only convincing regarding Truth and Epistemic Justification. It can also cater for important considerations concerning Fitting Address and Effectiveness. In this way, it can also respond to worries about the first horn of the dilemma. Crucially, the approach involves no necessary, or even tendential, alignment with a paternalistic or despotic outlook. Objectivist critics can be duly humble and considerate in their treatment of their addressees, approaching them with the respect owed to them as fellow autonomous reasoners. Effectiveness remains a challenge, but critics can and should explore with their interlocutors ways to develop motivating visions that reflect the normative reasons they have discovered through their best efforts of inquiry. The task is far from hopeless, as people have a tendency to seek what they believe is right and good for them.

What animates the worries regarding the first horn of the Critical Dilemma is the value of self-determination. But the objectivist approach presented here can recognize and effectively mobilize this value. Self-determination is indeed important in a number of ways. It is, first, directly morally important. Agents capable of practical reasoning may not be treated in condescending ways as mere rule-takers who are not also rule-makers, or as mere passive receptacles of aid with no say on how their own good is to be advanced. People have a right to set the terms on which they live, which includes the terms on which their well-being is promoted. This is an instance of the priority of the right over the good which I have been acknowledging all along. Second, self-determination has great epistemic significance. Each of us is often better placed than others to know what benefits us.[43] Third, self-determination is arguably an objective component of well-being. When we are engaged as autonomous reasoners and decision-makers in the processes that affect us, we get a benefit that is independent of the value of the final results—that of partaking as dynamic shapers of our own lives. Indeed, paternalism is typically not only morally problematic but also prudentially bad.[44] Finally, engaging the self-determination of those affected by certain rules and

[41] Haslanger (2021b: 40-1). When stating the first horn, Haslanger cites Honneth (2009: 44). She relies on Honneth (2017) to formulate the second.
[42] See Celikates (2017), Haslanger (2021b), and Ng (2015) for discussion of conceptual, epistemological, scientific, and metaphysical aspects.
[43] On the other hand, nobody is infallible or without blind spots, and we can learn a great deal from engaging in cooperative inquiry with others—both about what is right and about what is good, for ourselves and for them.
[44] Crisp (2021: sect. 4.3) and Wall (2017: sect. 3.5).

policies could enhance the feasibility of their implementation, as people are often more ready to sustain social orders they see as their own achievement rather than as an external imposition.

So, returning to Fitting Address and Effectiveness, the objectivist approach is compatible with an outlook that rejects authoritarianism. Agents' own reasoning, through which they assess views about the good and the right and search for reflective equilibrium, is the fundamental standpoint for normative reflection.[45] We should address others (and ourselves) in ways that engage this standpoint. To appropriately shape inquiry, deliberation, and action in social contexts, we should proceed together in a broadly democratic fashion, as free and equal partners in a common effort to improve our lot. Basic individual liberties should be respected as well. Thus, in the context of labor practices, it would be appropriate to give people real options for non-alienated work, but not to force them to engage in it. And well-being should not be directly served to others as a meal. Instead, enabling social conditions should be fostered so that each can achieve well-being on their own initiative and terms.

A related worry that arises when philosophers formulate substantive ideas is that they seem to assume an inappropriate status over and above everyone else in society. The proper role of philosophers is to identify and defend procedures of autonomous reasoning, not to say what the use of those procedures should select, which is a task for people themselves, individually or collectively. Philosophers should not overstep these boundaries and pretend to be philosopher kings, prophets, or judges. We see elements of this worry in Habermas's (1990: 122; 1998: chs. 2-3) critique of Rawls's theory of justice. Habermas complains that Rawls overreaches when, in addition to trying to articulate the standpoint of impartial moral and political reasoning (through his accounts of the original position and public reason), he tries to identify the correct norms of social justice (with his two principles of justice). A similar instance of the worry could be formulated for conceptions of well-being to say that philosophers should articulate and defend the best procedures of prudential reasoning, not dictate what well-being consists in.

The worry seems to assume that philosophical theorizing is radically discontinuous from the practical standpoint of ordinary people engaging in moral and political reasoning. But philosophy can be seen as a continuation of that reasoning. On this different view, philosophers simply spend more time and energy exploring the same questions. They can offer the results of their inquiry as hypotheses to be discussed by everyone as equals rather than as commandments handed down by superior philosophical experts.[46] The assessment of philosophical theses must occur, in the end, in everyone's critical and deliberative pursuit of reflective equilibrium. Philosophers can formulate hypotheses about issues of substance besides procedure, and ponder questions about well-being besides morality and justice. If there is no radical discontinuity between philosophy and the ordinary reasoning of people trying to solve their personal and social problems, then philosophers need not adopt unreasonable pretentions. Their inquiry is simply an intensification of ordinary critical thought, an intellectual device of self-enlightenment. It tackles aspects of our shared and commanding question: "How should we live?"

The foregoing points apply to critical theory. It is an exercise in intersubjective freedom. I use my freedom and address you in yours, and you do the same.[47] Effectiveness will have to be sought

[45] Scanlon (2014: 14). See also the discussion on epistemic justice in Haslanger (2021a: 51-5).
[46] Rawls's (2005: 426-7) response to Habermas effectively makes this point.
[47] Jaeggi (2018: Introduction and Conclusion) provides an illuminating defense of practical philosophy and critical theory as continuous with people's ameliorative reasoning and practices. Surprisingly, however, she claims that the task of the philosopher is best seen as a formalist one of proposing procedures of rational assessment rather than substantive views about the good and the right. But once the continuity is recognized, we need not think that if philosophers tackled substantive issues, they would arrogate to themselves especial epistemic or political credentials.

in ways that respect rather than circumvent or bend the self-determination of any agent affected. If circumstances are however nonideal because we face powerful dominant and oppressive agents who are not ready to deliberate with us and in fact undermine our efforts of democratic debate and change, then of course our interactions will have to be more conflictive and strategic.[48] But, even then, we could and should aim at enabling, and eventually activating more respectful arenas of common deliberation and decision-making that include them.

The worry about the potential paternalism and authoritarianism of substantive pronouncements is sometimes addressed to positions that themselves stipulate a radical discontinuity between the standpoint of ordinary people who are in the grip of ideology and that of theorists who manage to see through it. For example, Celikates (2017: 64-5) proposes that ideology critique take a "procedural turn" to primarily concentrate on how ideologies hamper the development or exercise of agents' reflexive and critical capacities. This is "a rather minimalist or formalist understanding," in which ideology critique does not (primarily, at least) focus on challenging substantive first-order attitudes of agents, their views of what is good or just, but on countering the "second-order" "blockades" they face in developing those first-order commitments. In this way, critical theorists can avoid an elitist attitude in which, treating people as "dopes," and talking "for" rather than "with" them, they tell them what to think and do.[49] People should figure these out on their own. In fact, they are often already forming alternative views in their social movements and other practices of resistance. The role of critique, as a second-order, proceduralist endeavor, is to engage those initiatives of contestation to facilitate and sharpen the critical process already under way in them.

I agree that the procedural dimension is important for ideology critique. Celikates's proposal illuminates the fact that claims about interests are typically the subject of social interpretation and dispute, which can be organized in more or less inclusive and egalitarian ways (see also Celikates 2021: 271-6), and helps counter authoritarian attitudes and achieve Fitting Address through respectful engagement with other people's own views about their interests. But once a radical discontinuity between critical theorizing and ordinary practical reasoning is disavowed, I think a sharp dichotomy between substantive, first-order operations and formal, second-order operations should be avoided. Critics must engage in the former to explain their involvement with certain social movements rather than others, and to contribute to the common task of outlining sound views about well-being and justice in processes of social change. Once they see that substantive judgments are essential for social criticism, they can articulate them explicitly and systematically for all levels of intervention. They can defend their second-order claims as calls for greater self-determination, and make first-level points about the badness or injustice of specific practices without arrogating for themselves the standing of superior authorities talking down at others.[50] These substantive claims can be examined—and then redeemed or rejected—in respectful debate

[48] The dynamics of conflict are important for ideology critique, and this paper's exploration should be extended to chart them.

[49] A target of Celikates's critical discussion is Althusser (2011).

[50] Celikates's proposal can be interpreted as consistent with this view. On this interpretation, the "procedural turn" does not say that critics should completely avoid substantive claims about first-order issues, but only that the latter are not primary and distinctive in ideology critique. There are elements in Celikates's (2017: 65) text permitting this interpretation. For example, the text characterizes procedural operations as the "primary focus" or primary "aim" of ideology critique but sees them also as having normative substance in supporting self-emancipation, and it allows developments of substantive claims about first-order issues as potentially "important philosophical tasks." I believe that both first-order and second-order claims can be cast in an objectivist mode, and that, as argued in 3.3, this enhances rather than undermines their holders' humility and openness to their interlocutors' responses.

among all concerned.[51]

4. Conclusion

The two theses defended in this paper are plausible and survive the challenges discussed. They are worthy of further exploration and debate. Ideologies often operate by invoking pictures of well-being that state or presuppose descriptive and normative claims that are false or distorted and have the effect of increasing the likelihood that we sustain forms of social life in which we wind up worse off than we could and should be. Ideology critique tries to break the hold of ideological stories, facilitate the discovery of our real interests, and activate our practical imagination. A key item on its agenda is to unleash our freedom to flourish.

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[51] Haslanger's (2021b) adopts a similar view, although since it focuses on epistemological issues it does not discuss in detail the nature and content of the prudential and moral claims made in the substantive contributions to social criticism voiced by participants in moral and political discourse.

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