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The ontology of labor

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In this chapter I analyze the notion of labor in the ontological framework of descriptive metaphysics. I draw a distinction between labor, work and job, and I explain how these three dimensions are connected. From this perspective, “labor” designates a process involving a physical or mental effort whereby a subject accomplishes a goal, “work” designates the goal itself, and “job” characterizes the subject that produces the work by means of the labor. After specifying these three basic dimensions, I investigate their ontological status and the variety of their instances. Lastly, I rely on the analysis of the notion of labor in order to address the basic question: why do we labor?

Keywords: labor, work, job, descriptive metaphysics

Introduction

Since ontology is the study of being, the ontology of labor should investigate the kind of being that is specific to labor. This is a rather neglected topic both in the history of philosophy and in the contemporary philosophical landscape. Ontological researches have traditionally focused – and still focus – on material objects such as particles or organisms, and abstract entities such as numbers or values, whereas labor is rather discussed in political philosophy and in the social sciences. The aim of this chapter is to show, on the one hand, that labor can be an outstanding subject of ontological investigation, and, on the other hand, that ontology can fruitfully contribute to a better understanding of labor.

In § 1, I shall present a basic ontological framework inspired by Peter Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics, which has brought Aristotle’s ontological conception into contemporary analytic philosophy. In § 2, I shall draw, within that framework, a distinction between labor, work and job, and I shall explain how these three dimensions are connected. In § 3, I shall show how this ontological account allows us to take different kinds of labor into account, thereby reviving a philosophical project whose roots can be found in Plato’s dialogues, especially in the *Republic*, the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Lastly, in § 4, I shall argue that the ontology of labor can shed some light on the reasons why labor is so crucial for the life of human beings.

1. The framework

Strawson’s *Individuals* is an attempt to discover the structure of the world starting by analyzing how language works. What Strawson calls “the world” is our shared version of the world, that is, what beings such as us ordinarily experience as *our* world. From this

perspective, inherited from Aristotle's metaphysics, Strawson individuates the ordinary use of language as "the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy" (Strawson 1959, 9). He labels his metaphysics as "descriptive" since he aims to *describe* what the world is for beings provided with perceptual, cognitive and linguistic systems such as ours, instead of forcing us to conceive of the world by revising our basic ways of experiencing it.

However, Strawson is not arguing that a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, *philosophy*. He does not try to reduce ontology to semantics. He just argues that semantics is our best *way to philosophy*, thereby leaving room for the possibility that an ontological investigation revises the semantic insights with which it started.

Descriptive metaphysics is an especially well-suited framework for the ontology of entities such as labor whose existence seems to be deeply entrenched in our social and cultural practices, and thus lucidly reflected by our linguistic uses. I thus start by outlining Strawson's ontological view, with the aim of clarifying some basic ontological notions that I shall exploit in the second half of the chapter.

Particulars

Strawson's main linguistic way to ontology is the subject-predicate structure. He characterizes this structure as a sentence constituted by two linguistic expressions (S, P) that introduce two non-linguistic terms (S*, P*) into a proposition (which attributes P* to S*). He observes that in language there are special kinds of non-predicable expressions that normally work only as subjects, not as predicates (cf. Strawson 1959, 174). The basic non-predicable expressions are demonstratives and proper names. They introduce *particulars*, that is, entities that we can localize in the shared unified spatiotemporal framework of our experience: "particulars have their place in the spatio-temporal system, or, if they have no place of their own there, are identified by reference to other particulars which do have such a place" (Strawson 1959, 233).

From Strawson's perspective, the basic particulars are bodies and persons. *Bodies* are "three-dimensional objects with some endurance through time" (Strawson 1959, 39). *Persons* are special bodies to which we attribute not only spatiotemporal locations (and physical or manifest properties), but also experiences and mental states. In Strawson's terms, what is in fact ascribed to persons consists of "actions and intentions (I am doing, did, shall do this); sensations (I am warm, in pain); thoughts and feelings (I think, wonder, want this, am angry,

disappointed, contented); perceptions and memories (I see this, hear the other, remember that)” (Strawson 1959, 89).

Events and higher-level particulars

Events in turn are particulars, but they sharply differ from bodies with respect to their identification. One can wholly identify a body just by experiencing its *spatial parts or properties*, whereas the whole identification of an event also requires the experience of its *temporal parts or properties*. In other words, a body can be instantaneously experienced as a whole, whereas the experience of an event as a whole necessarily unfolds in time. For example the ontological difference between a particular body such as a tiger and a particular event such as a flood is that “the flood is not wholly present throughout each moment of its existence – at each moment only a part of the flood is present, not the whole flood – whereas the whole tiger is” (Crane 2001, 36). A special kind of events is that of *actions*, which can be conceived of as events that are up to persons, that is, events that reveal themselves to be “intentional under some description” (cf. Anscombe 1957; Davidson 1980).

According to Strawson, events are ontologically less basic than bodies since we can identify whatever body without referring to any event, whereas most events can be identified only by referring to the bodies involved in them. For example, “a death is necessarily the death of some creature” (Strawson 1959, 46). Still, in some exceptional cases, the identification of events does not depend on the identification of bodies. Consider for example purely sensory events such as flashes or noises: “That a flash or a bang occurred does not entail that anything flashed or banged. ‘Let there be light’ does not mean ‘Let something shine’” (Strawson 1959, 46). But these are precisely exceptions. Whatever body can be identified without referring to events, whereas some (indeed, most) events need to be identified by referring to bodies. From Strawson’s perspective, this asymmetry is sufficient to state the ontological primacy of bodies.

Besides bodies, persons and events, there are *higher order particulars* as for example families, teams and armies. Such things are not events or persons, neither are they material things such as bodies because “one of the requirements for the identity of a material thing is that its existence, as well as being continuous in time, should be continuous in space” (Strawson 1959, 37). Yet, in spite of lacking spatial continuity, things such as families or teams are particulars since, at any moment of their existence, they can be identified by making reference to more basic particulars whose existence is continuous in both space and

time. For example, a family can be identified by making reference to its members, a team by making reference to its players.

Properties

All particulars share the feature of being introduced into ordinary subject-predicate propositions by expressions (e.g. demonstratives, proper names, definite descriptions) that can only be used as subjects, not as predicates. We cannot say “X is Socrates” unless X is another expression referring to Socrates; yet, in the latter case, we have no longer an ordinary subject-predicate proposition but an identity statement. An expression introducing a particular can, at most, contribute to the constitution of a predicate, but it cannot be a predicate on its own. For example, “X is older than Socrates” is an ordinary subject-predicate proposition in which the expression “Socrates” contributes to the constitution of the predicate (“is older than Socrates”) that is attributed to that particular X. By contrast, “X is Socrates” may only be a statement of identity in which the expression X introduces the same particular introduced by “Socrates”.

Subject-predicate propositions normally needs genuine predicates, that is, expressions introducing *properties*. An expression introducing a certain property P allows us to construct several subject-predicate propositions sharing the form “x is P”, in which the values of the variable *x* introduce different particulars (e.g. “Socrates is a philosopher”, “Kant is a philosopher”, “Wittgenstein is a philosopher”).

Strawson conceives of the property as a *universal*, that is, “a principle of collection of like things” (Strawson 1959, 226). While a particular has, on its own, its place in our spatiotemporal system, a universal has its place thanks to its instances, that is, the particulars that manifest it.

Finally, in the domain of properties, one can distinguish between *monadic* properties and *relational* properties or *relations*. While a monadic property only involves one particular, a relational property involve more than one particulars. For instance, “being red” is a monadic property whereas “being close to” is a relation.

Individuals

In ordinary subject-predicate propositions, the subject introduces a particular and the predicate introduces a property, that is, a universal. More generally, Strawson calls *individuals* the entities that are introduced by subjects into genuine subject-predicate propositions. He is inclined to treat individuals as the entities that primarily exist in our world, since he considers the linguistic functioning of subjects as a clue of the existence of

what they introduce. The subject is, indeed, a linguistic expression that has a certain degree of completeness. By introducing a term, the subject implicitly suggests the existence of such a term. By contrast, the predicate introduces a term without suggesting any existence at all. For example, in the sentence “The Sun is yellow”, the subject “The Sun” presupposes that there is something identifiable as the Sun regardless of the following predicate, whereas the predicate “is yellow” does not presuppose any existence unless it is paired with a subject. The subject commits on its own to the existence of a certain entity, whereas the predicate commits to existence only if it specifies a feature of an entity whose existence has already been suggested by a subject. From this perspective, the subject has a semantic privilege, which Strawson traces back to an ontological privilege of the non-linguistic term, namely the *individual*, that the linguistic subject introduces into a proposition.

Since particulars play a key subject role in our subject-predicate propositions, they can be treated as the basic individuals of our world. Yet, in our language, also expressions introducing properties can play the subject role. For example, we can say “red is my favorite color”, and we can even use the derived word “redness” so as to emphasize the fact that an expression introducing a property can play the subject role. Thus, properties seem to be individuals, to the extent that they are introduced by expressions that can play the subject role in a subject-predicate proposition.

Still, Strawson doubts that properties are genuine individuals. Although the use of language is our best way to ontology, some linguistic expression can be ontologically misleading. Indeed, individuals are not only introduced by subjects, but also introduced within sentences *that cannot be satisfactorily paraphrased into sentences about particulars*. For example the putative individual introduced by the expression “anger” does not seem to be a genuine individual, since a proposition that has “anger” as subject can normally be satisfactorily paraphrased. As Strawson puts it: “the paraphrase of, say, ‘Anger impairs the judgment’ into ‘People are generally less capable of arriving at sound judgments when they are angry than when they are not’ seems natural and satisfying” (Strawson 1959, 231). Such paraphrase shows that anger, just as redness, is not a genuine individual, but rather a property.

Ultimately, Strawson’s distinction between individuals and properties can be related to the Aristotelian distinction between substance and attributes (cf. Wiggins 2001). While individuals (or substances) exist on their own, properties exist thanks to the individuals that bear them. In short, individuals *have* properties, whereas properties *are of* individuals.

Tropes and sortals

The ontological framework that Strawson proposes in *Individuals* relies on two basic distinctions, namely, that between universals and particulars, and that between individuals and properties. Individuals usually go hand-in-hand with particulars just as properties go hand-in-hand with universals. However, this correspondence is not absolute.

On the one hand, as Strawson (2006) acknowledges, there can be particular properties, that is, those properties possessed by a particular individual. For example redness is a universal property but that redness of that particular apple is a particular property or *trope*.

On the other hand, there can be universal individuals or *sortals*, that is, universals whose instances are not tropes of particular individuals, but the particular individuals themselves. For example, redness is not a sortal because its instances are tropes, whereas animal is a sortal because its instances are not particular properties but rather particular individuals (this animal, that animal ...).

Types and tokens

Among sortals, Strawson attributes a special ontological role to *types*, which, unlike all other universals, behave like particulars under two decisive respects. First, in subject-predicate sentences types are normally introduced by subjects rather than by predicates. Second, types often have a proper name.

While universals basically are principles of *collection* of like particulars, types are first of all principles of *construction* of like particulars called *tokens*. For example, a novel such as Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is a type whose tokens are particular printed copies.

A type allows us to *collect* particulars in virtue of being the principle that specifies how to *construct* them. In this sense the type plays not only an *epistemic* role but also an *ontological* one. That is why we treat types as genuine individuals. In Strawson's terms:

The general title of "types", often, though rather waveringly, confined to words and sentences, may well be extended. I have in mind, for example: works of art, such as musical and literary compositions, and even, in a certain sense, paintings and works of sculpture; makes of thing, e.g. makes of motor-car, such as the 1957 Cadillac, of which there are many particular instances but which is itself a non-particular; and more generally other things of which the instances are made or produced to a certain design, and which, or some of which, bear what one is strongly inclined to call a proper name, e.g. flags such as the Union Jack. (Strawson 1959, 231)

Facts and states of affairs

Lastly, one can call *facts* the connections between individuals and properties (cf. Crane 2001, 39). While individuals correspond to linguistic subjects and properties to linguistic predicates, facts correspond to the linguistic connections between subjects and predicates that constitute propositions. In sum, a fact is the possession of a certain property by a certain individual. It is a fact that the Sun is yellow and it is a fact that Italy borders France.

More generally, one can call *state of affairs* a possible connection between an individual and a property thereby reserving the term “fact” for a state of affairs that actually occurs. For example “the Moon revolves around Venus” is a mere state of affairs whereas “the Moon revolves around the Earth” is a fact.

2. The three dimensions of labor

The phenomenon of labor involves three distinct albeit connected dimensions that I shall highlight by resorting to the three terms that denote labor with different connotations, namely, “job”, “work” and “labor” itself. By “labor” I mean a process involving a physical or mental effort whereby a subject accomplishes a goal. Interestingly, this fits well with the use of this term also to designate the process of giving birth to a baby. One might say that the latter is the paradigmatic case of labor, which is, in general, an effortful means to a valuable end.

While “labor” designates the means, “work” designates the end. Consider for instance a craftsman who builds a table; the latter is her work, while the building process is her labor. Lastly, “job” characterizes the subject that produces the work by means of the labor. For instance, a person’s job is craftsman since that person produces works of a certain kind by means of a certain kind of labor.

After specifying these three basic dimensions of the phenomenon, let us consider their ontological status, that is, their place in the ontological framework described in the previous section. Labor is a kind of action, which in turn, as seen above, is a kind of event. Job is rather a property, which allows us to group people with respect to their labor.

The ontological status of work, instead, is more heterogeneous. Some jobs involve the production of particular material objects. For instance, craftsmen can build things such as tables or beds. Other jobs, instead, involve the production of particular facts. For instance, doctors can heal patients, and plumbers can repair faucets. That is to say that the doctor produces the fact that the patient is healed, and the plumber produces the fact that the faucet is repaired. Moreover, there are jobs that involve the production of universal individuals,

namely types. For instance, an engineer can design a car, which is not a particular car, but rather a principle of construction of like cars, that is, a type of car.

Labor, work and job, albeit logically distinct, are significantly connected. On the one hand, the connection between labor and work is a causal relation. Labor is the cause, work is the effect. To work is to causally produce works through labor. On the other hand, job introduces a normative relation between a person, her labor and her work. In virtue of this relation, a person is entitled and committed to perform the kind of labor and produce the kind of works that are prescribed by her job. Job thus functions as a rule of behavior that systematizes and governs the connection between a person, her labor and her work. In John Searle's (1995) terms, a job is a "status function", that is, a rule that prescribes what one is entitled and committed to do. Just as the function of a hammer specifies what it should do, namely, hitting nails, the job of a person specifies what she should do, namely, producing certain works by means of a certain labor. For instance, the job of the cook specifies that one should produce dishes by means of one's labor.

Job is what turns labor into a social fact. Let us consider a beaver making a dam. We might call "labor" the beaver's effort, and we might call "work" the dam, but there is arguably nothing to be called "job" there. While labor and work just describe somebody doing something, job requires a community that expects somebody to do something. A dam builder, unlike a beaver, is not just somebody who makes dams. If dam builder is one's job, then one is expected to make dams.

As a normative connection between a person, her labor and her work, job involves a bundle of entitlements and commitments. For instance, in virtue of having a certain job, one is committed to regularly be in a certain workplace at a certain time, and is entitled to regularly receive a salary. Job thus puts normative constraints not only on the worker herself but also on the attitudes and behaviors of the community towards that worker. Arguably, job is the most powerful way in which human communities assign roles and functions to their members, turning them into what one might call "human artifacts".

3. The varieties of labor

In the *Republic*, Plato highlights three basic categories of jobs that essentially contribute to the life of a community, namely, rulers, soldiers and producers. The ruler and the soldier are special jobs since they directly concern the community. That is to say that the work that they produce through their labor are facts that constitute the current state of the community. Specifically, *rulers* are expected to take care of the welfare of the community while *soldiers*

are expected to take care of its safety. Thus, the fact that a ruler should contribute to produce is a wealthy and flourishing community while the fact that a soldier should primarily contribute to produce is a safe community.

Producers, unlike rulers and soldiers, make works that do not directly involve the community. Indeed, they indirectly contribute to the life of the community by providing specific works. Plato stresses the crucial contribution of three categories of producers: *farmers*, who provide the community with food; *craftsmen*, who provide the community with buildings, clothes and tools; *traders*, who enables the circulation of the commodities produced by farmers and craftsmen. Farmers and craftsmen mainly produces objects, namely, commodities, whereas traders mainly produce facts, for instance the fact that a certain commodity is available in a certain place at a certain time.

To sum up, the job of rulers and that of soldiers directly take care of the community, whereas the job of producers is rather to make (if they are farmers or craftsmen) or distribute (if they are traders) commodities that are of interest for the community. In addition to these, Plato outlines another category of jobs, whose outcomes are facts that involve particular members of the community. For instance, doctors are expected to produce healed patients while teachers are expected to produce educated students.

That being the case, we can classify jobs in three macro-categories: community-oriented jobs (viz. rulers, soldiers), member-oriented jobs (viz. doctors, teachers) and commodity-oriented jobs (viz. farmers, craftsmen, traders). Moreover, in the *Statesman*, Plato introduces a further distinction that applies within each of these macro-categories, namely, the distinction between jobs that consist in giving orders and jobs that consist in executing orders.

If somebody works on one's own, the distinction collapses, and we might say, at most, that one executes the orders one gives to oneself. However, in human communities labor is usually organized in a way that significantly relies on the distinction between giving and executing orders.

In commodity-oriented jobs, this distinction matches that between designers (e.g. engineers, architects, agronomists) and workers (e.g. welders, bricklayers, farm hands); the former produce work types, that is, principle of constructions of like particulars that count as orders for the latter, who must actually construct such particulars. Likewise, in community-oriented jobs, the distinction between giving and executing orders matches that between rulers and civil servants working in the public service, as well as that between officers and privates in the army. Interestingly, many jobs involve both giving and executing orders. This is what

happens when labor is hierarchically organized. In such case, one executes orders coming from the top of the hierarchy by giving orders directed towards the bottom of the hierarchy.

The distinction between giving and executing orders seems to be less relevant in the case of member-oriented jobs. Teachers and doctors usually work on their own, they execute their own orders, as it were. However, the distinction between giving and executing orders might be of some relevance also in such domains: for instance, the job of the nurse can involve the execution of orders coming from doctors. Moreover, member-oriented jobs are often done in hierarchically organized institutions such as schools or hospitals, and in these cases teachers and doctors are to some extent constrained by the guidelines of the directors of those institutions.

Although Plato built up his ontology of labor almost 2,400 years ago in a historical context very different from ours, his main categories seem to still hold their validity. Community-oriented jobs, member-oriented jobs and commodity-oriented jobs seem to be the three main kinds of jobs nowadays as well. The economic and technological development has involved changes *within* the categories rather than changes *of* the categories. For instance, within the category of commodity-oriented jobs, trade has played a more and more crucial role thereby imposing its medium, money, as a sort of meta-commodity, and thus giving rise to a new kind of jobs, namely, financial jobs.

Another peculiar commodity that plays a crucial role in contemporary society is that constituted by representations, that is, texts, pictures and sounds. Representations can carry knowledge or information, but can also aim to elicit appreciation or entertainment. Thus, among the jobs that produce representations, one might include not only the scientist and the historian but also the artist and the showman.

The kind of representation-oriented jobs is the main topic of the *Sophist*. In this dialog, Plato draws a sharp distinction between jobs that aim to produce truthful representations and jobs that aim to produce fanciful representations. He sees the philosopher as the paradigm of the former class, and the sophist of the latter.

In his analysis, Plato conflates ontological and axiological claims, that is, statements concerning the being of things and statements concerning their value. He does not limit himself to state that the philosopher and the sophist are different jobs; he also states that the job of the philosopher is valuable whereas the job of the sophist is rather harmful. I am rather sympathetic with this analysis, which I find topical. However, in this chapter, I would like to disentangle ontology from axiology since I believe that axiological claims can be more

effective if they rely on a preliminary ontological analysis carried out in an axiologically neutral way.

From this perspective, the category of representation-oriented jobs can be articulated along two distinct dimensions. On the one hand, the distinction considered above, namely, that between representations that pursue the truth and representations that do not care about the truth. On the other hand, the distinction between representations that present themselves as aimed at the truth and representations that present themselves as indifferent to the truth. The intersection between these distinctions gives us four kinds. First, representations that present themselves as aimed at the truth and actually are so, for instance the works that should be produced by jobs such as the scientist or the philosopher. Secondly, representations that present themselves as indifferent to the truth and actually are so, for instance the works produced by jobs such as the artist. Thirdly, representations that present themselves as aimed at the truth but actually are indifferent to the truth. This is the sort of work that according to Plato is produced by the job of the sophist. Indeed, the dramatic ontological discrepancy between the truthful appearance and the fanciful nature of such representations is what motivates Plato's axiological condemnation of the sophist, whom he sees as a professional impostor. However, in a pragmatist vein, one might object that even such a job might play a positive role in the life of a community if it succeeds in leading citizens to do the right thing, in spite of persuading them by means of some deception.

The last representational kind to be considered consists of those representations that present themselves as indifferent to the truth but actually are aimed at the truth. This is a rather peculiar job that one might call "the Shakespearean fool". It is a job that reveals itself to be especially valuable in a repressive society in which some truths cannot publicly asserted and thus, if one wants to express them anyway, one should disguise them as fiction.

4. Why labor?

The ontological clarification of the phenomenon of labor puts us in the right position to address a basic question – arguably, the most basic question – concerning our relation to this phenomenon, namely, why do we labor? There are two main strategies for answering this question, namely, an *external* strategy that looks for the answer outside the phenomenon of labor and an *internal* strategy that does so inside this very phenomenon.

Let us begin with considering the external strategy. A basic version of this states that people labor in order to *directly* satisfy their needs and desires. This seems to be a good explanation of primitive human activities such as hunting, gathering and farming. However, in more

advanced societies, the goal of labor seems to be rather the *indirect* satisfaction of need and desires via money. That is to say that people labor in order to acquire the money that allows them to satisfy their needs and desires.

Both these versions of the external strategy are individualistic in the sense that they explain why a person labors by resorting to reasons that are external to labor itself and are rather grounded in needs and desires of that individual. Yet, one can also propose a non-individualistic external strategy, according to which one labors in order to contribute to the life of the community to whom one belongs. From this perspective, the efforts one makes in laboring are compensated by the benefit that one's community receives from the outcomes of such efforts.

While external strategies situate the reasons of labor either in the individual who labor or in the community to whom she belongs, the internal strategy situates the reasons of labor in this very phenomenon. Specifically, one can distinguish three internal strategies that correspond to the three dimensions of the phenomenon, namely labor, work and job.

First, we can identify the reason of labor with labor itself if this is a valuable or pleasurable activity in spite of the effort it requires. Games and sports seems to be activities of this kind, and thus the sportsman can be considered a paradigmatic case of job that finds its reason in the kind of labor it prescribes.

Secondly, we can identify the reason of labor with the work produced if this is a valuable object or event or fact. Works of art are usually considered things valuable for their own sake, and thus the artist can be considered a paradigmatic case of job that finds its reason in the kind of work it produces.

Thirdly, we can identify the reason of labor with the property that relates a person to his or her labor, namely, the job. We can do so if such property involves some pleasurable feature such as prestige or power. In particular, in virtue of its relation to power, the statesman can be considered a paradigmatic case of job that finds its reason in itself.

In principle, labor rests upon both internal and external reasons. That is to say that the ideal job is such that it enables satisfaction of needs and desires, fruitfully contributes to the life of the community, and it is valuable for the activity it involves, just as for the works it produces and the status it confers. On the other hand, labor risks to become a sort of curse when its reasons come down to the external ones, especially when labor allows only the satisfaction of needs, not that of desires. From this perspective, the factory worker is usually considered, at least since Marx and Engels, the paradigmatic case of job that lacks internal reasons thereby involving alienation. While the craftsman may find valuable the outcome of her labor, the

factory worker finds it hard to do so since she does not directly produce the object but limits herself to taking care of a machine that does that. Furthermore, with the raise of the systematic division of labor called Taylorism (and its practical application, Fordism), the outcome of the factory worker's labor is no longer a fully-fledged work but only a small part of it. Heidegger's criticism of technology also can be seen as a criticism of the transformation of labor into something lacking internal reasons. Relying on his etymological method, Heidegger points out that the ancient Greeks used the word "techne" to designate both the art and the technique, and he sees this as a symptom of the fact that in ancient societies the outcome of technical jobs was valuable for its own sake just as a work of art normally is. Yet, according to Heidegger, technology in modern societies has completely disconnected itself from art, and this involves that technical jobs no longer can find their reason in the works they produce through labor.

The distinction between internal and external reasons seems to be crucial also to understand utopian conceptions of labor. In particular, the raise of robotics might lead to the possibility of assigning to robots many jobs that are usually carried out by human beings, thereby leading us to rethink labor (cf. West 2015, De Vos 2018). In this sense, I contend, there are two main options to be considered, which I will call "internal-labor option" and "no-labor option".

According to the internal-labor option, a society might assign to robots jobs lacking internal reasons, thereby allowing human beings to focus on those having internal reasons. This would somehow restore the identity of art and technique that, as Heidegger points out, was expressed by ancient Greeks through the word "techne". Arguably, in ancient societies the unification of art and technique was possible because of slavery. Although Heidegger does not acknowledge this, the citizens could enjoy jobs having internal reasons since the jobs lacking internal reasons were carried out by the slaves. In the utopian "new techne" that the internal-labor option foreshadows, robots would play the "techne-enabling" role that slaves played in ancient societies.

According to the no-labor option, instead, a society might assign to robots all jobs, thereby delivering human beings from labor. In particular, one would be delivered from job understood as a norm that prescribes one to labor in order to produce a certain work. It is worth considering the relationship between the no-labor option and the idea of a basic income (cf. Van Parijs 2001). In an utopian community that combines advanced robotics and basic income, citizens can still produce works by means of their labor, if they want, but there is no longer a job prescribing specific labors and works to them. In this sense, the combination of

robotics and basic income might allow humanity to approximate the situation that Marx and Engels describe in this passage of the *The German Ideology*:

In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.

It would surely be fruitful to further compare the no-labor option and the internal-labor option in order to establish which of them is more worth pursuing. However, this is precisely the point where matters of being become matters of value, that is, the point where ontology ends and axiology starts. Since mine is an essay on the ontology of labor, this is precisely the point where it must end.

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