Confronting Domination: Freedom and Democratic Authority

I argue that the proliferation of meaningful work requires the institution of a system of workplace democracy with the dimensions of democratic authority and agonistic participatory practices. In this chapter, I will explore the first dimension of democratic authority, arguing for a system grounded in the value of freedom as non-dominination.

In the standard economic treatment of work, freedom in work is preserved when we enjoy the negative freedom to enter into or exit from a contract of employment. However, negative freedom fails to account for what we think is worthwhile in the most attractive forms of work; in other words, meaningful work as free expressive activity which creates and reveals the full humanity of the worker. Given this, freedom in work is often explored using ideas based upon positive freedom. However, in my account of meaningful work, we cannot call work free when capabilities meant for the purpose of experiencing the bipartite value of meaningfulness are illegitimately constrained. Examining capability deformation requires an understanding of freedom which takes account of how relations between persons, and particularly authority relations at the level of the organisation, enable or disable our capabilities for meaning-making, and support or undermine our status as co-authorities in the realm of value. I shall explore this concern by applying the republican concept of freedom as non-dominination to the action contexts in which we interact with others in the work of social cooperation. In so doing, we shall need to conceive of domination, not only in the neo-republican sense of being subject to the capricious will of another, but also as being excluded from participating in the framing of social structures which shape our subjectivities. I shall show that non-dominating intersubjective relations in the
work of social cooperation are secured within coordinating authorities, which are legitimate when they are democratic authorities, and that realising the link between freedom as non-domination and authority as democratic authority is part of what enables us to realise the value of meaningfulness in work.

Non-domination and the value of meaningfulness

In order to experience the bipartite value of meaningfulness, we must develop the two capabilities for objective valuing and subjective attachment, supported by our equal status as co-authorities in the realm of value. By acquiring these capabilities we become valuers, able to make our contribution to the creation and maintenance of positive values within a liberal perfectionist framework. I went on to claim that the constitutive dimension of autonomy as non-alienating work is grounded in the irreducible autonomy in every act of work, where a person’s ineliminable encounters with materiality and with others give rise to interpretive differences – replete with productive potential to multiply the range of positive values when they are brought to conscious evaluation in public deliberation. I identified how interpretive differences with the possibility of realising the emancipatory potential of work emerge from applying the rationality of *phronetic techne* to our responsibilities of care for worthy objects. In the midst of fulfilling these responsibilities, we respond to the demands of particular situations requiring the uniting of means and ends, by exercising our capacities for thinking, feeling, and judging. And I proposed that we realise our autonomy in the meaningfulness of work when we act as valuers, as meaning-makers, by bringing interpretive differences into public deliberation through democratic practices at the level of the task, participation in which demands that we be able to experience certain kinds of supportive institutional and intersubjective conditions.

If we are to be secure in our capabilities and status, and thus to have the confidence to bring interpretive differences into public evaluation with others, then we need to experience the personal condition of non-domination in institutional arrangements which are characterised by non-dominating intersubjective relations. Thus the possibility of any particular individual being able to realise freedom in their work does not depend solely upon forms of positive freedom such as experiences of expressive freedom in experiences of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), or negative freedom such as being able to choose to enter into or exit from employment relations, but also upon his or her ability to