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Subject to Change - Social Work, Moral Regulation and recent debates on Alienation

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Introduction

Social Work[1], always having to reference the personal autonomy of its clients in some way when intervening in their lives, is a decidedly modern endeavor. The goal of pedagogy in modernity is "the development of persons in the direction of personal states and ways of acting considered valuable"[2] (Brumlik 2004, 28). Accordingly, social work aims at the social conditions enabling such development[3], "its central purpose is the directed exertion of influence on those aspects of social identity and life conduct that have been marked as problematic from the perspective of the social" (Oelkers/Steckmann/Ziegler 2008, S. 11). Thus, social work refers to the *relation* of individuals and the social (Sünker 2005, 167).

In Germany, social work originates in a specific solution to 'the social question', that is the problems of a population boom and mass poverty in the move to an industrialised, capitalist mode of production in the 19th century. The chosen way to deal with these developments encompassed social security measures, notably for cases of unemployment and illness. This lead to a separation of the problems of poverty and labour, as the municipal providers of poor relief could redirect their funds towards the unemployed (cf. Hammerschmidt/ Tennstedt 2010, 74) and their 'bettering' through pedagogical measures, i.e. interventions that focused on making the life conduct of individuals compatible with the transforming demands of capitalist production. These kinds of interventions leave the conditions for a certain kind of autonomy intact, in turn enabling the freedom to submit oneself to the labour market.

These developments at the root of modern social work in Germany can only be roughly sketched here, but serve to show that modernities' promise for individual autonomy lead to the invention of ways to morally regulate the life conduct of individuals such that they are able to use this autonomy without disrupting or threatening the institutions of modern states. One of the central actors in the regulation of 'the social' is the institution of social work. I will argue that the primary mode of regulation through Social Work is moral. 'Morals' are explored from two angles in the course of this article:

On the one hand, morals are a way of reproducing hegemony through regulating subjectivities, i.e. of governing people without directly forcing them to behave in a certain way. Social work appears to be an agent of individualising social problems, thus legitimising and reproducing (partly unjust) social relations from this perspective which is explored in the first part of this article.

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[1] I thank the reviewers for helpful remarks on a first draft of this article.

[2] Translations of quotes originally in German by the author.

[3] One central dilemma of social work consists in the fact that most of these conditions are unavailable to the influence of social work, mainly socio-political measures of collective protection of life risks such as illness, the availability of status protecting wage labour etc.

On the other hand, a moral critique opens up the possibility of criticizing the lack of practical preconditions for *individual* autonomy without referring exclusively to individual deficits. Accordingly, the second part of this article explores two current approaches to a theory of 'alienation' (and its inverse appropriation) as a focal point for such critique going beyond the production of compliant subjectivities. This is argued to be necessary to legitimise moral interventions into the life conduct of individuals.

Thus, moral interventions into the life conduct of individuals, which are typical for social work, emerge as simultaneously limiting and enabling their clients' self-determined transformation of relations to oneself and the world.

1 Social Work as institutionalised Moral Regulation: Liberal Rule and Appropriation

Moral regulation is a term introduced by Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer in their book on the formation of the English state (Corrigan & Sayer 1985). They argued that the state and its institutions are not merely a superstructure, but itself a major force in bringing about cultural shifts in society by delineating what constitutes an 'appropriate' social identity and morally policing citizens accordingly. Years later, this notion of moral regulation sparked a small debate in a special issue of the Canadian Journal of Sociology (1994, Vol. 19, No. 2), and, among a few other works, a historical study by Alan Hunt of several projects of moral regulation (seen as being mainly furthered by the middle classes) in Britain and the US (Hunt 1999). Although this theoretical concept was never widely used, it is arguably useful for thinking about social work in terms of a state-induced project of moral regulation intervening into civil society and aiming to form subjectivities.

In drawing on the notion of ‘moral regulation’, ‘moral’ does not refer to a codified, abstract system of norms. Rather, what is meant here are questions of moralisation, that is the process through which subjects are moralised; and questions of ethics, that is self-formation in the practices of everyday life. For example, how are subjects constructed and acted upon? How do subjects know and decipher themselves and consequently act? This way of posing the problem goes back to Foucault’s famous notion of government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ to influence the structure of the field of possible actions of others. In the case of social work, this might for example be done through competence testing, support and assistance plans etc. Moral regulation in this sense has a dual character as being both externally regulative and internally constitutive (cf. Corrigan & Sayer 1985, 194).

Thus, social works' so called 'dual mandate' of help and control[4] is not really dual in the sense of two fundamentally differing logics, but should rather be understood as two sides of the same coin: 'Help' in the sense of preserving or regaining agency in welfare state contexts is principally granted in terms of a compatibility with given institutions. As such, it is always already 'control' in the sense of perpetuating these institutions, their legitimacy, policies and procedures, even if the will of the clients is taken into account.

In social work, people’s strengths, abilities and plans are subject to (sometimes intense) scrutiny. Yet, the notion of regulation also implies that clients are not coerced into conducting their life in a specific manner. Governing “free individuals” in liberal societies rests on a

[4] The 'dual mandate' is an ubiquituous term in German debates on social work first formulated bei Böhnisch and Lösch (1973, 28). It is usually understood as two different tasks ascribed to social work: The task of furthering the well-being of clients ('help') as well as ensuring compliance with behavioural norms through education and/or coercive measures.

process of individualisation. Self-government becomes important, thereby putting the abilities and capacities of citizens at the centre of attention. The social work method of counselling for example, with its principles of being voluntary and respecting the autonomy of life praxis, works on the knowledge that the self has about itself. Similarly, competence testing is not merely about producing knowledge about facts, but also about how the self should see itself and consequently act. To not align one's actions to knowledge that was produced in a voluntary and open discourse, as in the ideal of counselling, would not be reasonable (cf. Duttweiler 2007, 269). At the same time, there are measures which are directly aimed at conduct, such as sanctions in case of non-compliance.

Hence, projects of moral regulation are to be found in specific governmental and administrative programmes that aim at directing the life conduct of actors, especially through defining what can be called life choices, because - at least in concept - it is up to the individual to decide what course of action to take. These programmes are constructed, reinforced, interpreted (or subverted) by social workers who mediate the reflexivity of their clients, leading to the allocation of specific interventions. Thus, moral regulation influences the knowledge actors possess on social relationships and institutions (cf. Ruonavaara 1997, 280). Standard patterns of experience are determined (cf. Corrigan 1981, 320f.) by reproducing certain (appropriate, permitted, desirable) forms of expression for certain social identities (e.g. diligence in the case of unemployed people). These 'normalised' patterns are then expected to be expressed appropriately. Through delineating potential paths for life conduct, social work interventions also act as a medium for placing people within social hierarchies.

Hunt (1999, 7) differentiates six features of moral regulation:

- a moralised subject
- a moralised object or target
- knowledge (informal or expert)
- a discourse within which the knowledge is given a normative content
- a set of practices
- a 'harm' to be avoided or overcome.

Hunt stresses that "the moral dimension is the result of the linkage posited between subject, object, knowledge, discourse, practices and their projected social consequences" (ibid.). Thus, the 'problems' social work tackles are not a predetermined set of (moral) issues, but arise from the historically specific relation generally assumed between these elements of moral regulation, where "moral discourses link a moralized subject with some moralized object or practices in such a way as to impute some wider socially harmful consequences unless subject and practices are subjected to appropriate regulation" (Hunt 2007, 280).

As an example[5], interventions targeting young people with labour market related problems (e.g. 'NEETs' - not in education, employment or training) in Germany can be interpreted in

[5] For a detailed reconstruction of this specific context see Düker 2013.

this way. There always is a moralised subject (the programs' instructor or the case manager in a social work agency) and a moralised object or target (an adolescent without a job or formal apprenticeship) who build a relationship to avert or remedy the individual and social harm of unemployment. In our example, (impending) unemployment is supposed to be harmful for 'society' as a whole as wage labour is seen to be the primary way of contributing to the common good. Hence, unemployment is treated in hegemonic discourse as a deviation from normality to be eliminated - rather than a permanent feature of the capitalist mode of production to be discussed in its effects for social reproduction (cf. e.g. Galuske 1993). Informal or expert knowledge (on competencies, the local labour market or the familial relations of the adolescent) is employed and normatively charged as it is a applied to the end of the bettering of the person through acquiring competencies, nudging clients to available jobs or resolving family problems. Specific practices 'translate' these discourses 'pedagogically' to make them work in the everyday life of clients. Such practices could entail competence testing, teaching of work techniques or generally motivating young people.

The connections between the elements of moral regulation are often explicitly stated in pedagogical concept papers and are actualised and adapted in interactions with clients and other professionals. For example, the connection between the subject and object of regulation might be construed as hierarchical or as equitable as possible, the practices might be geared more towards the presumed social or the individual harm done, and the invoked discourses might refer to the relevant knowledge in terms of a manual to be followed precisely or in terms of rough guidelines to be interpreted and translated to each individual case. The dominant discourse on social work (which changes over time) favours some relations between the elements of moral regulation over others, making them more probable to appear especially in concepts, but also in practice.

Hence, the concept of moral regulation has the potential to analyse the way the capitalist state forms the self through e.g. educational opportunities, chances for recognition, the parameters for the distribution of material wealth, social security measures and their implications for a normal life conduct, the ensuing class- and milieu-based self-concepts, and especially through the placement in the social hierarchy[6]. This placement is mainly catalysed through access to (certain forms of) wage labour, which has a paramount influence on everyday life conduct: It is a “central medium of material reproduction, social placement, the patterning of time on the micro and macro levels of biography and daily routine as well as – mediated through its centrality – significant for the individual development of persons in dealing with the material and social contexts of the occupational sphere” (Galuske 1998, 535).

Social work processes behaviours, attitudes, aspirations and relationships that are regarded to be individually and socially problematic. Social work interventions, at least conceptually, do not employ coercion as their primary means of working on individuals and their relationships. Rather, the modern promise of individual autonomy (cf. Meyer-Drawe 1990) manifests as the principle of 'helping people to help themselves' by working on their dispositions, aspirations and behaviour to make them conform to the hegemonic ideas of appropriate life conduct which are manly geared towards the spheres of production (mainly through wage labour) and reproduction (mainly through the family). “This form of power targets everyday life, which

[6] There are other ways the state influences the formation of the self, such as the design of the local environment, the infrastructure in place etc. These are also partly influenced by social work, as e.g. in Germany is evident in social works growing focus on networking and democratic decision making in and by the local community (“Sozialraumorientierung”).

categorises individuals, ascribes to them their individuality, binds them to this indviduality and imparts upon them the law of a specific truth which they have to recognise in themselves and others. This form of power transforms individuals into subjects. The word 'subject' has two meanings: It denotes the subject subjugated to the rule of another and dependent on them; and it denotes the subject bound to its own identity through consciousness and self knowledge. In both meanings, the word suggests a form of power which subjects and subjugates" (Foucault 2005, 245).

Hence, individual autonomy is seen as a specific form of rule, as a more subtle way of controlling and making productive the powers of individuals through discipline that increasingly takes the form of self-discipline geared towards what is construed as 'normal' life conduct. Through this, individuals subject themselves to the powers of the 'free' market and reproduce them: "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself." (Foucault 1977, 30). This form of subjection, although firmly rooted in the spheres classically defined as 'private' or as civil society is explicitly framed as power of the state: The spaces, the freedoms, the rights obtained by the individuals in their conflicts with the central powers, simultaneously inititate a quiet, yet mounting inscription of their lives into the state order, thus building a new and even more terrifying foundation for the souvereign power from which they sought to be free. (Agamben 2002, 129).

This socio-theoretical perspective posits social work as a form of liberal rule, which makes it possible to look at the contingent problematisations of peoples' difficulties, because these 'difficulties' are always defined in terms of conceptions of what constitutes 'normal' life conduct and a 'good' life - and in turn what is seen as problematic and thus as subject to change. However, such a perspective is also necessarily agnostic to a central aim of social work: However problematic the idea of personal autonomy might be, it is indispensable for working on the everyday problems of clients related to their life conduct, as some reference to individual concerns, dispositions, aspirations and life plans needs to be made if social work is to be more than moulding subjectivities according to institutional demands.

While a distanced analysis of moral regulation as a way of conducting peoples' conduct, of the promise of personal autonomy as a way of liberal rule sheds light on the (partly unintended) ramifications of institutions ostensibly designed to help people lead the life they want to lead, it does not offer a way to assess social work interventions themselves morally. A reflexive or critical appropriation of ones' everyday life presupposes a reference to the normativity of life conduct, as a perspective has to be established that allows for emancipatory relations to the self and the world. A critique of 'governmental' (cf. Foucault 2000) practices, when taken on its own, neglects that everyday relations of individuals are indispensably moral (cf. Hasenfeld 2000). Describing what people value and aspire to from a purely sociological perspective and in its hegemonic functionality negates their subjectivity, as „people (…) are *concerned* about what they do and what happens to them and *justify* their actions rather than explain them externally" (Sayer 2005, 949).

This aim of personal autonomy however can only be realised socially. Social work as moral regulation has to acknowledge and act upon concrete practices of life conduct, as subjectivity is embedded in these socially mediated practices. Thus, the way people plan and conduct their lives as well as their (self)reflexive capacities become morally significant for social work interventions. Following Manhart and Rustemeyer (2004), ascribing some kind of deficit in

this regard to persons that can be ameliorated through learning is an attribute of pedagogical fields (such as social work).

This way of addressing persons and the resulting necessity of working on the self implies specific jumping-off points for further actions. To reiterate, such critique of life conduct is a double edged sword: On the one hand, certain types of autonomy are prevented, as dispositions, aspirations and behaviours deviating from what is perceived as the norm are subject to change. This is hardly avoidable, as the possibilities embedded in institutions downright constitute autonomy: What is aimed at or expected are specific, conformal forms of autonomy that are compatible with the institutions assigned to fostering them. On the other hand, moral critique of life conduct opens up a possibility for criticising a lack of practical conditions for autonomy, however limited these may be. By focusing on the way individual aspirations, desires, actions etc. are integrated into social circumstances, this critique might also avoid the pitfalls of blaming problems solely on individual deficits.

As will become evident in the next chapter, the concept of moral regulation allows avoiding another pitfall of making (the avoidance of) alienation central to a discussion of social work: A theory of alienation could focus solely on the way the self acts upon itself and singling out problematic or deficient ways of self-care, individualising and isolating the problem of identity and reiterating the centrality social work ascribes to individual dispositions and behaviour. Politically, this could also result in a form of identity politics which merely celebrate disenfranchised identities without working on the social roots of their disenfranchisement.

In summary, social work cannot avoid some kind of reference to subjectivity, but needs to be wary of simply taking either the hegemonic problematisations of life conduct nor the will of its clients as the 'be all end all' of its interventions. Recently, the term alienation has been used to try to solve this conundrum of a subject-critical appraisal of subjectivity. In the following, two general attempts to rejuvenate the discussion on alienation are analysed to assess the terms' usefulness for understanding what could be considered a problematic relation to self and world beyond deviation from the norm.

2 The Resurgence of Debates on Alienation

Recently, there has been a resurgence of Marxian theory in the German social sciences (cf. Butello/ Nachtwey 2018, 9), marked by conferences, collected volumes at big publishers etc. This renewed interest is not only attributable to Karl Marx' 200th birthday, but to the financial crisis of 2008 which made 'capitalism' an intelligible topic and casts this form of economic and social organisation into doubt (again). It could also mark a renewed interest in or desire for normative orientation (Maihofer 2014, 164).

One of the central terms for Marx' early writings and for Marxist discussion (especially in the 1970s) is the concept of 'alienation', which equally gets more attention in recent years. The term itself with its negative connotations immediately suggests a normative critique of individual and social states, with a strong focus on the subjectivity of actors, as it is them that can become estranged or alienated from the social. One of the central questions arising from the discussion of alienation revolves around the reference point of this critique: Should it be an immanent critique that tries to weigh subjectivity against its self-imposed, but not realised goals and values? Or should it be an external critique appraising subjectivity according to predefined goals and values?

In the following, I will discuss two major proponents of the current debate on alienation with differing answers to this question; Rahel Jaeggi, who argues that critique should be strictly immanent so as to avoid paternalism, and Hartmut Rosa, who tries to derive an external reference point for critique by referring to the physical constant of time.

2.1 Rahel Jaeggi: Alienation as the Unavailability of Self and World

Rahel Jaeggi is a philosopher who proposes a redefinition of the concept of alienation (Jaeggi 2005) that incorporates liberal as well as poststructuralist ideas, especially in trying to avoid to predetermine what constitutes 'good' life conduct or the 'right' subjectivity. In a more recent book (Jaeggi 2014), she fleshes out what a critique of 'forms of life' could look like without resorting to paternalist conceptions of the good life.

Alienation according to Jaeggi (2005) is not a purely Marxist category. Rather, it is conceptualised as a state in which the subject cannot act on its concerns and cannot appropriate the world as a result of its own doing. Alienation is characterised as a simultaneous lack of power and meaning. This leads to a situation where people are not “available” to themselves, where they feel they cannot influence what they want or what they can do. People 'drift' through their lives, things merely happen to them without them being able to influence it. This disrupts practices of appropriation which lose their openness and inclusiveness. 'Appropriation', as the inverse of alienation, denotes a relationship in which the subject takes possession of objects which are transformed in the process of appropriation. Objects however are not arbitrarily malleable but possess properties that have to be taken into account by the subject to be able to appropriate them. In this view, alienation does not mark a removal from a 'true', 'inner' self or encompasses the goal of total disposal over the self. Rather, it addresses the emergence of the self in the process of appropriation, outside of which there is no substance of the subject (cf. Jaeggi 2002). By way of this conceptualisation, Jaeggi accomplishes two things: An entity capable of acting remains, subjectivity is not completely dismissed as "discourses do not act" (Bauer/Bittlingmayer 2007, 16). However, the subject does not exist as a cause prior to its actions. Rather, it is produced (again and again) in social practice and only shows in "publicly accessible articulations" (Jaeggi 2005, 192).

However, a critique of idealistic conceptions of autonomy does not have to reject the concept of agency completely. What is rejected is a certain, humanistic conception of subjectivity which assumes a rational consciousness that is totally transparent to itself, as well as the authenticity of speech as the substance of individuality (Olssen 2006, 253). Instead of trying to identify the core of subjectivity, understanding alienation as remoteness from this core and appropriation as reconciliation and mending of the fracture, Jaeggi proposes to look at the capacity to refer to one's own dispositions and aspirations and participate in shaping them, that is to govern oneself. This reference to the self is a reflexive activity as a precondition for experiencing the world as malleable and push against the coercion to adapt, to create limited spaces of conscious action (Scherr 1997, 59).

This also means that there needs to be a possibility space for conscious action, and coercion is at least partly self-inflicted. Modern subjects then are "always victim and culprit simultaneously" (Jaeggi 2005, 42). From this theoretical perspective on subjectivity, social work clients do not appear to be exclusively victims of moral regulation. Agency remains a possibility, not just beyond, but in the framework of moral regulation, insofar as it refers to an "internal reconstruction of that self-concept (...) which we develop and pursue inasmuch as we understand ourselves as acting persons" (Jaeggi 2005, 69). This perspective immanently addresses the inconsistencies of everyday life conduct to open up the possibility of

transcending them. Thus, it makes a central problem of social work comprehensible by not only asking what clients want, but also how their volitions are being limited and how they can participate in shaping the process of transformation of their subjectivity which is an inescapable goal of institutions of moral regulation.

In the state of alienation, subjects can not influence their own ways of being and acting. This results in a "silencing of processes of experience" (Jaeggi 2005, 185) and a loss of the ability to move through ones' life relatively freely, of agency and autonomy. This is objectively problematic even if it is not experienced as suffering but as natural or appropriate. Insofar, alienation is a moral perspective in the sense that it addresses the functionality of volition without predetermining the right way of life while also offering the possibility of criticising life conduct immanently (Zunke 2011, 17). At the center of critique is not what is pursued, but the process in which dispositions and aspirations are pursued.

From the perspective of the subject, the ambivalence of institutions of moral regulation as both enabling and restrictive can be described as alienation. What these institutions offer can often not be related in a comprehensive way to ones' problems of life conduct. This often manifests in a feeling of not having command over the actions which express ones' connection to the world. This in Jaeggis' view means that alienation from self and the world are inextricably intertwined, because the subject cannot appropriate the world as a result of its own actions (Jaeggi 2005, 14). This use of the term alienation first of all points to the fact that not all deviations from normality are pathological, and conversely that not every adaptation to social expectations is desirable for the subjects. Thus, it can be utilised as a benchmark for social work: "Actually overcoming alienation for instance, which is at the centre of many ethical forms of critique, ultimately encompasses the 'appropriation' of the basic social structure by those affected themselves - as one that is responsive towards their demands and can be democratically determined" (Forst 2009, 163). Thus, responsivity and democratisation are conditions for preventing alienation through institutions open to appropriation.

For example, in the case of young people in the transition from school to work, social work with disadvantaged youth often faces a crucial problem: How to reconcile the aspirations and desires of young people with the (often poor or inadequate) opportunities of the labour market? What constitutes an acceptable course of action cannot be determined purely subjectively from the perspective of the young people themselves, not only because of a lack of labour market experience that often leads to 'unrealistic' expectations, but also because of the problem of adaptive aspirations. We can observe this phenomenon in respect to the cooling out effect (cf. Goffman 1952) where occupational aspirations of young people are adjusted downwards the longer they stay in the 'transitional system' from school to work. But the right course of action can neither be determined solely objectively, from the outside, because this would destroy the autonomy of life praxis. Hence, Jaeggis' question whether the desires and life plans of people are worked on and transformed under conditions that allow them to grasp these aspirations and consciously work on the self is vital for social work practice.

Through this orientation towards processes, Jaeggi aims to incorporate 'post-structural' approaches critical of subjectivity and essentialism (Jaeggi 2005, 46ff.). This line of critique roughly summarised below, tries to radically rethink the modern ideas of autonomy and selfhood: If a strong notion of subjectivity is assumed, this would imply a concept of harmonious, true or natural subjectivity from which one can be alienated. The autonomous subject then becomes the sacrosanct root of all actions, deciding freely and without ties to the

world. This concept of autonomy would also presuppose the juxtaposition of interior and exterior to enable the definition of autonomy as the absence of the oppression of the inner sphere by the outer sphere. This kind of juxtaposition would be problematic, as it assumes the possibility of fundamentally differentiating between individual and social causes and thus of independent causes of actions in the form of subjects. Autonomy in this sense is an illusion, as autonomous persons are constructed through political acts. In the words of Mark Olssen, "a belief in our own authorship binds us to the conditions of our own production and constitutes an identity that makes us governable." (Olssen 2006, 260). According to the illusion of autonomy, only people that are socially and psychologically entirely independent are truly autonomous, which makes this concept irreconcilable with solidarity, loyalty, interpersonal ties and commitments. "Being an autonomous subject turns out to be a programme of governance, a certain kind of governing humans" (Kessl 2005, 51).

Thus, the subject is not pre-social essence of humankind, but is itself socially constructed. This would render a crucial distinction of any concept of alienation obsolete: The differentiation between what belongs to the self and that which does not. If subjectivity is merely an intersection of discourses, if life conduct is merely an outcome of moral regulation, the social can never be alien as it constitutes the self. However, such a radically subject-critical perspective neglects the subject matter of social work, that is the problems of everyday life conduct:

> „We are normative beings, in the sense that we are concerned about the world and the well being of what we value in it, including ourselves. The most important questions people tend to face in their everyday lives are normative ones of how to act, what to do for the best, what is good or bad about what is happening, including how others are treating them. (…) If we ignore this lay normativity or reduce it to an effect of discourse or socialization we produce an anodyne and alienated account of subjectivity that renders our evident concern about what we do and what happens to us incomprehensible.” (Sayer 2005, 949f.).

Although social work needs to distance itself somewhat from the self-interpretation of its clients, they are necessary for determining *individual* states of alienation as clients should have some control over living *their* lives. Jaeggi's purely immanent critique has the advantage of being sensitive for the context-dependence of moral demands. People's specific way of living their lives, their life conduct partly determines to what extent their wishes, desires and aspirations can be realised. Jaeggi proposes to establish 'forms of life'[7] in which it is possible for people to articulate a critique if life conduct themselves. However, I would argue that absolute abstinence in terms of what constitutes successful life conduct so as to avoid any kind of paternalism leads to its own form of paternalism by not being applicable to the reality of institutions. The problem with labeling every critique that is not immanent as paternalist is that not participating in this form of immanent critique could then itself be considered unreasonable. This is especially pertinent to institutions of moral regulation such as social work looking for a modus operandi: If this understanding of alienation was to be their yardstick, these institutions would have to try to get people to become reflexive in this way (sometimes by threat of sanctions in the case of non-cooperation). This could then be

[7] In her recent monograph, Jaeggi (2014) uses the term "Lebensformen" which translates to 'forms of life' to emphasise the supra-individual nature of these "culturally molded forms of human coexistence"(Jaeggi 2014, 20). I prefer the term 'life conduct' to accentuate the possibility of humans acting as well as the Foucauldian notion of a 'conduct of conduct' as mentioned above in the discussion on moral regulation.

understood as a different kind of paternalism, as social work fosters and demands this form of self-criticism while otherwise leaving clients to their own devices.

Two examples to underscore this point: Firstly, a purely immanent critique is analytically problematic as the reality of social work is structured by the twin normative benchmarks of wage labour and middle-class families (that is, families whose everyday life conduct corresponds to expectations towards the middle-class). A middle-class oriented way of life and subsistence through wage labour are indispensable goals of social work. They might be subverted, there might be pockets of social work that allow for the experimentation with different ways of conducting one's life, but exemptions from these normative expectations are hard to legitimise and finance in the long run.

Secondly, critical reflexivity, although it should indeed be part of every social work intervention, is sometimes not enough in a moral sense: Some educational practices are inherently worse than others, be it corporeal punishment, practices of shaming or even cooling out expectations of disadvantaged youth so as to keep them in social contexts that might be detrimental to leading an at least partly self-determined and meaningful life (such as wage labour associated with low compensation and recognition). These kind of educational practices hinder appropriation rather than enabling it.

This critique points to a more general issue with Jaeggi's theory of alienation: It is a non-empirical, philosophical approach that, apart from a general characterisation of modernity, abstains from any analysis of major current social conditions and forces. Thus, it is not possible to appraise systematic reasons for institutions not being conducive to appropriation from this perspective. Put differently, Jaeggi rejects any difference between inner and outer spheres (self and world): "my objection against this model is directed against the alleged dichotomy itself" (Jaeggi 2005, 191). The self in this view is nothing more than the process of its externalisation. The question arises what the object of appropriation can be in this model, as appropriation was constructed as a process during which subject and object of appropriation are both changed - which implies not only a differentiation of subject and object, suggesting a more materialist account, but also a before and after which should be impossible given the self is only ever its externalisations in the present. In referring to alienation, there should indeed be no assumption of undistorted pre-social needs, aspirations and desires. It is impossible to separate the influence of socialisation from wishes ‘themselves’. Nevertheless, the concept of a subject acting upon itself presupposes some kind of analytical distinction between the self and the social. In the words of Mitchell Dean: the task is not to assert something like the causal primacy of the social but to show how this primacy occurs in particular cases (Dean 1994, 146).

This problem can also be seen in the 'critique of forms of life'. Although Jaeggi keeps emphasising the relational aspects of her theory of alienation and her analysis of forms of life as encompassing not only "an ensemble of practices and orientations", but also "their institutional manifestations and materialisations" (Jaeggi 2014, 20f.), her account of alienation is ultimately about the way the subject relates to the world: "It is less about *what* we realise, but *how* we realise something, respectively how we actualise ourselves in carrying out our actions" (Jaeggi 2005, 247). Thus, 'relational' is understood such that social structures are not criticisable. The object of critique is always the way subjects relate to the social.

This is a perspective that is very tempting for social work professionals. After all, a social worker cannot fundamentally change the social roots of problems of life conduct, such as

poverty, sexism, racism etc. However, not taking into account these causes while analysing problems of life conduct leads to a skewed account of a particular case, which in turn facilitates an intervention that overly relies on the capacity of individuals to shape their relation to the world. But if alienation is a specific feature of modernity, its causes must be social in nature and cannot be suspended through a different attitude to the world.

2.2 Hartmut Rosa: Alienation through Acceleration

In contrast to Rahel Jaeggi, the sociologist Hartmut Rosa bases his theory of alienation (Rosa 2013a) on an explicit appraisal of current social conditions. His central analytical term is acceleration, which he argues characterises modernity as a whole (cf. Rosa 2013b). In making time the focal point of a theory of the relation between subject and world, he aims to anchor his critique in a development external to the subject so as to identify a neutral point from which to assess problems of life conduct. Time itself seems to be neutral in that it is a physical constant and is experienced as a fact of nature (Rosa 2013a, 91). Thus, temporal phenomena are generally exempt from political discussion. However, acceleration is not a natural phenomenon but a social one, as it is an expression of wide-ranging cultural changes. The three aspects of acceleration identified by Rosa exert an anonymous kind of pressure on individuals and form a "regime of coercion" (ibid.) responsible for alienation. Technical acceleration refers to processes of transport, communication and production (20). Social acceleration refers to the growing speed of social change itself and the decreasing stability of institutions, most notably the family and wage labour (22f.). Lastly, acceleration of the pace of life refers to the "*increase in the number of episodes of action or experience in a given unit of time*" (27) which is a consequence of the need or desire to do more in less time.

These multiple facets of ubiquitous acceleration denote a lack of time and result in a lack of objective possibilities to shape one's own volition and to realise one's life plans. This is the starting point for various types of critique (Rosa 2013a, 95ff.)[8] which basically follow the major strands of the theory of individualisation and pluralisation as elaborated by Ulrich Beck, while also trying to analyse the ramifications of these macro-sociological developments for the formation of subjectivity. Similar to Jaeggi, alienation takes the form of an intersection of powerlessness and meaninglessness, which becomes especially clear in Rosa's ethical critique: Modernities' promise for autonomy results in alienation because the social conditions for realising the ethical ideas of actors do not exist (Rosa 2013a, 120), most notably in terms of heteronomy at the workplace (Rosa 2013a, 115f.), which for most people does not allow control over a major arena of life conduct[9]. However, this also means that a lack of autonomy does not stem from coercion in the traditional sense, as alternative ways of deciding and acting are possible. Rather, what is meant here is again a specific, pathological relationship of self and world which is mainly characterised by a meaningless mode of consumption. Buying things is significant for processes of identity formation (Rosa 2013a, 125) as it is the primary way of acquiring goods in capitalism and the central precondition for their appropriation. However, according to Rosa real appropriation takes time, as we need to get to know the smell, look and feel and of course the functionality of increasingly complex things (e.g.

[8] Rosa differentiates functionalist (immanent) and normative (external) forms of critiquing social conditions. The latter can be differentiated further into moral and ethical variants. While moral critique focuses on questions of justice and the distribution advantages, ethical forms of critique are based on conceptions of the good life and are most relevant to the way Rosa frames alienation.

[9] Alienation from the product of one's work and from the activity of working itself are two of the four forms Marx originally identified as specifically capitalist forms of alienation in his ' Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts' (Marx 2009/1884).

smartphones) which we possess for increasingly short amounts of time (Rosa 2013a, 125f.). In a situation in which the social demands people place on themselves produce a potentially endless to-do-list of needs and desires for things, time is always too short and people constantly do things that they do not really want as they do not feel fulfilling (Rosa 2013a, 133).

This and other pressures of modern life such as an overabundance of information necessary for making important life choices (Rosa 2013a, 130) impart a constant bad conscience in the subjects, as they are not able to act and develop their personality the way they would like to or think they have to. Again, they cannot act on their concerns and make the world their own. Although appropriation plays a major role for Rosa's account of alienation, he coins his own term as the antithesis of alienation: resonance. Amassing things without truly appropriating them, which would take time and effort and might lead to their loss being painful, keeps people at a distance from these goods (Rosa 2013a, 142f.). The same holds true for human relationships. As the relationships to things and people are important for forming an 'identity', people are not able to tell a coherent, binding and convincing story about themselves (ibid.), as their relationships to the world are not "open, vibrating, respirating" (Rosa 2016, 26). In contrast, a relationship to the world characterised by resonance makes it seem "resounding and colourful and one's own self animated, sensitive and rich" (ibid.).

This rests on a differentiation of 'real' experiences ("Erfahrungen") in contrast to 'generic' experiences ("Erlebnisse") (Rosa 2013a, S. 133ff.). What Rosa means by this is that 'real' experiences need time and effort so as to create a possibility of a self-determined transformation of subjectivity. In contrast to this, 'generic' experiences offer instant gratification and are easier to integrate into the increasingly busy everyday life conduct of modern individuals. However, 'generic' experiences are mostly experienced as unsatisfying and even heteronomous as they are not what people 'really' strive for. Examples for 'real' experiences given by Rosa are writing a book (2013a, 131), playing the violin, visiting friends, listening to a Wagner opera (133) or using a telescope (134). Examples for 'generic' experiences are surfing the internet (132), buying clothes, updating the computer, making a tax declaration, watching TV (133) and generally buying a lot of stuff (135, passim). Apart from the question if the 'real' experiences are indeed intrinsically more valuable than 'generic' experiences, a pattern emerges which is problematic when thinking about social work: The 'real' experiences here are closer to what could be called bourgeois refinement, that is the fine differences of taste Bourdieu described in his seminal study 'Distinction' (Bourdieu 1987). Practices of distinction ensure that different social classes stay distinguishable through their everyday practices of life conduct and cultural consumption, in effect preserving and legitimising the social distance between different classes. Although Rosa emphasises that the problems of acceleration involve all social groups (Rosa 2013a, 133), the chosen examples seem to pertain to problems specific to the middle and upper classes.

This is even more pronounced in Rahel Jaeggis' work, as she analyses four (fictitious) example cases to illustrate different aspects of alienation (Jaeggi 2005, chapter II). These cases are a young scientist and his wife in a suburban area (72), an ambitious young editor, a financial counsellor and a TV journalist (92), a "declared, confident and reflexive feminist" (125) and the literature professor Perlmann from Pascal Mercier's novel "Perlmann's Silence" (161). These are all members of the middle and upper classes, with the possible exemption of the feminist.

The examples and cases Rosa and Jaeggi chose to illustrate their points are not a coincidence, firstly because they probably reflect their own experiences, but also because both, despite all protestations to the contrary, frame alienation if not as a self-inflicted problem then at least as a problem to be solved by the individuals themselves. Although Rosas' functionalist and normative critiques emphasise macro-sociological causes and causes related to unfair distribution of resources, the suspension of alienation through resonance is only addressed in the context of ethical critique. As Rosa observes himself, "resonance is obviously more of an existentialist and emotional than a cognitive term" (Rosa 2013a, 148). Resonance is achieved through a refinement of the relationship between self and world which doubles as a practice of cultural distinction. This is especially relevant for social work, as distinction keeps disadvantaged milieus in their social position, which is often the reason for a lack of opportunities for appropriation in the first place. This is not merely problematic in the discussion on the limits of ethical forms of critique, as knowledge on disadvantage and oppression cannot stay external to (the analysis of) social work practice. Social work aiming to widen the opportunities for appropriation needs to work on the concerns, dispositions and life plans of its clients. This indeed takes time (to experiment with opportunities and to establish a professional relationship between social worker and client) and reflexivity as preconditions for clarifying the concerns of the clients and acting on them. But it also needs control over material resources as well as the power to make decisions concerning one's life conduct, which are eminently political questions that sometimes have to be enforced against the institutions (and more concretely organisations) of social work themselves.

This is not to say that power and meaning as the two strands of the theory of alienation that both Jaeggi and Rosa grapple with should be unified under the banner of freedom and autonomy. The pedagogical goal of a self-determined development of one's potentials rather than an integration into a socially determined way of life demands a kind of reflexivity on part of the clients that enables them to work on their concerns and what matters to them. Margaret Archer argues that people's concerns, that is "those internal goods that they care about most" (Archer 2007, 7), are developed into projects, that is "courses of action" (ibid.) to realise these concerns. Projects in turn form the blueprint for actions upon oneself and the world. People reflect and evaluate “their situations in the light of their concerns and […] their projects in the light of their circumstances” (Archer 2007, 4).

However, this reflexive activity should not be separated from the social position of the client in question. Archer talks about 'vested interests' (1995, 203ff.) in this context, which are those interests of a person made probable by their social position, such as the interest of a worker to keep her job. These interests act like tendencies that might be displaced by other tendencies or powers internal or external to the subject. These interests are not determined by social position, but ignoring them implies "opportunity costs" (Archer 1995, 205) which are especially high in the case of the often disadvantaged clients of social work, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of emotional costs such as being shamed. This is to say people do not have these interests per se, but they have to somehow relate to them and sometimes act upon them if they want to avoid disadvantages. In this way, autonomy and the possibility to avoid meaninglessness through reflexivity are intertwined: More freedom might increase the chances for thoroughly reflecting on ones' concerns, projects and actions - which is probably why examples for appropriation respectively resonance are most easily discussed in the framework of middle class concerns. However, as social work demands a middle class oriented kind of life conduct from its clients, this kind of reflexivity is especially important in working on their dispositions, aspirations and desires to counteract the tendency that as an

agent of moral regulation, social work "establishes beliefs of a fundamental legitimacy of the existing arrangement in the recipients of its services through pedagogically translating and flexibilising the regulations and behavioural imperatives of superordinate and more powerful institutions" (Dollinger 2011, 232).

Christoph Henning (2015, 200ff.) proposes a third strand for a theory of alienation that goes beyond autonomy and meaning by adding a materialist dimension. As appropriation is always the appropriation of real, albeit malleable objects with given properties, a theory of the goal and contents of appropriation is needed to avoid just making more appropriation or even consumption the goal. What is needed then is a "theory of the good, which indicates the forms of accomplishment of a successful life or of successful forms of community" (Henning 2015, 204) so as to not bind the accomplishment of autonomy to institutions which only offer support for specific, hegemonic forms of life conduct in the form of 'integration'. This leads back to Marx' early writings, in which he proposes a normative account of being human (through the process of externalisation) which refers to the "affirmed potentials for development in specific historic conditions" (Elbe 2014, 8). One such theory of the good is the capability approach as (among others) developed by Martha Nussbaum (2000), who proposes a "thick vague theory of the good" (Nussbaum 1995, 456) culminating in a list of functionings necessary for good human life without predetermining cultural forms and individual concerns. This 'aristotelian' approach enables a materialist perspective which respects the concerns, dispositions and aspirations of individuals while providing a yardstick for identifying necessary conditions of appropriation: "The Aristotelian takes wishes seriously as something to be considered when asking how well a system enables people to live a good life. But he insists on also and more emphatically asking what these people can actually do and be - and wish" (Nussbaum 2002, 40).

The discussion of this very rough framework of how concerns as a way of 'capturing' subjectivity for social science are put into practice and the need for a materialist analysis of appropriation points to a further demand on alienation theory: While sociological macro-analyses and philosophical accounts of modernity might shed light on general causes that increase the probability of alienation to occur, an evaluation of states of alienation has to take into account the subjectivity in question to assess the specific problems with the relation of self and world. This highlights the need for empirical research on how alienation occurs in individual cases.

3 Conclusion

A thick vague theory of the good as a 'measure' of alienation could act as a proposal for interpretation of problems of life conduct experienced by clients of social work so as to identify which areas of life conduct should be subject to change and in which way subjectivity should change so as to realise the promise of social work being 'help for self help'. However, this rests on a materialist account of obstacles to appropriation, so as to avoid or at least tackle the problem of help merely being a translation of hegemonic political rationalities into the life conduct of individuals. The aporias of social work frequently arise from autonomy being presumed as being the original state and a given property of individuals. In reality, the preconditions of autonomy have to be historically carved out and individually established time and time again.

As fostering individuality is a central benchmark for the quality of social work programmes and practices, the concerns of individuals become a gateway for moral regulation such that even the creation of institutional leeway for individual idiosyncrasies reproduces hegemony

by facilitating social problems to be processed individually. Thus, from a perspective of overcoming alienation, it is central to institutionalise the preconditions for flourishing, which centrally encompasses a form of critical reflexivity as a safeguard against moral regulation. This is especially pertinent as 'alienation' is meant to capture an invisible form of domination, a kind of powerlessness that is not easily recognisable by the actors themselves as it contradicts the promise of liberal societies. The concept of alienation is thus stripped of analytical power if it is mainly framed as a practice of cognition as is the case in Jaeggis' account and, to a lesser degree, in Rosas'. Rather, it is a result of economic forms that are the central mechanism of distributing life chances, which also integrate the self in specific ways. Hence, it is a major task for social work to criticise institutions such as social work itself that are not recognisable as human-made and contingent so as to make these institutions more responsive and reflexive towards the concerns of their clients, even if these are as of yet unknown.

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