

# Journal of Politics and Ethics in New Technologies and AI

Vol 4, No 1 (2025)

Journal of Politics and Ethics in New Technologies and AI



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doi: [10.12681/jpentai.39269](https://doi.org/10.12681/jpentai.39269)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Can Political Liberals Have a Coherent Position on AI and Work?

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### Abstract

This paper outlines a political liberal perspective on the issue of artificial intelligence in the workplace. Some criticisms, related to autonomy, domination, and alienation, are derived from political moralities unacceptable for the political liberal; however, they identify concerns that should be considered. Additionally, other perspectives could forbid trade-offs for workers that are permissible for a political liberal (or should be). I explain the typical arguments and explain how the concerns can be reconceived, rather than rejected, because they relate to the moral powers, providing an acceptable justification for political acts with the caveat of permitting trade-offs. However, I explain that there are implications for the political liberal to recognise work, and its surrounding issues, can relate to the moral powers. I finally outline some political acts, such as a social minimum, support for worker voice and input, and the ability to co-own property, to permit a range of work options.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence; political liberalism; ethics of AI; workplace justice; moral powers

### 1. Introduction

There are many concerns regarding the increasing use of artificial intelligence in work. However, many of the criticisms are not acceptable for the political liberal, posing a challenge to seemingly either accept or reject the controversial criticisms. Political liberalism, unlike other perspectives, has strength in offering both normative and concrete policy ideas for pluralistic, liberal nation-states, even if the ideal model is far from realised. In this paper, I explain how some of the criticisms of artificial intelligence's impact on the nature of work, and economic structures and activity are incompatible with political liberalism. This incompatibility arises because most arguments can only be justifiable when derived from political moralities that are either insufficiently liberal, draw on perfectionist (liberal or otherwise) or comprehensive moralities, or ignore reasonable preferences for certain pursuits and making trade-offs regarding work. However, I argue that the criticisms of AI in the

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Place, J. (2025). Can Political Liberals Have a Coherent Position on AI and Work?. *Journal of Politics and Ethics in New Technologies and AI*, 4(1), e39269. <https://doi.org/10.12681/jpentai.39269>

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank David Stevens for his invaluable feedback in earlier iterations of this work, as well as Mathew Humphreys, Tom Parr, and Gulshan Khan, as well as attendees of MANCEPT 2020 when I presented this argument for their helpful comments.

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workplace identify valid concerns, and rather than embracing perfectionistic ideas or abandoning the concerns, there is an alternative approach that political liberals can take, which should be rooted in the moral powers. By using the moral powers, as initially developed by Rawls (2001, pp45-47; 1996, p335) over broader comprehensive claims, there is a justification for an approach and political acts, that respond to the use of AI in work that appeals to *all* conceptions of the good. This argument, however, has implications regarding how political liberals should approach work in general. I consider some implications of this argument in terms of a theoretical political framework, including a social minimum, worker input, and institutional support for voluntary collective ownership, which ensures the capacity of choice in the type of work people pursue and an ability to make trade-offs, while being protected from the harms of AI in the workplace.

I start by outlining the political liberal position. This includes explaining the concept of the moral powers and the opportunity for meaningful work. I then outline and criticise themes that are present in many common arguments regarding artificial intelligence, namely autonomy, domination, and alienation, as they are at odds with the political liberal desire to find justifications for the use of political power that are acceptable to all reasonable conceptions of the good. I explain the choice of the political liberal and develop an argument to link the concerns of alienation, loss of autonomy, and domination to the moral powers, to develop a political liberal foundation for my argument, because, while controversial, these arguments do identify some valid concerns. The argument lays the foundation of an uncontroversial position regarding artificial intelligence concerning work by utilising the moral powers as a basis for an argument regarding artificial intelligence. I consider some wider, radical implications for how to approach work in general and consider certain political acts that could be justifiable from a political liberal position to facilitate the often-overlooked benefits of artificial intelligence while offsetting the harms to the moral powers' development and exercise.

## **2. The Position of This Paper**

I first clarify some key terms surrounding political liberalism. Political liberalism is anti-perfectionist, as it rejects the idea that there is a conception of the good more valuable than another, or at least holds that this should have any relation to political frameworks. It demands state neutrality in its justification of the use of political power (Chen, 1998), as in, its justification is acceptable to all reasonable persons, (Freeman, 2007, p202) which has been called the “acceptability requirement” (Clayton and Stevens, 2015), meaning the justification and use of power be abstracted from wider comprehensive claims to ensure the use of power must be acceptable to all reasonable citizens regardless of their conception of the good life (Rawls, 1995, pp315-324; Larmore, 1999). Political liberalism rejects perfectionism and

comprehensive liberalism. Perfectionist in the sense that there is a preferable conception of the good life. This may be, to use Chen's typology (1998), liberal non-neutral perfectionists, who prefer the state to promote such conceptions of the good such as Raz (1988) or Hurka (1996), or neutralist perfectionists, such as Dworkin (2011), who believe the state should be neutral toward conceptions of the good, even if they believe there are preferable conceptions of the good, or even illiberal. By comprehensive liberals, I refer to those who are willing to adopt broader philosophical claims into a political framework, such as Dworkin, who claims that all politics relates to ethical claims, as opposed to political liberals like Rawls (1995) who aim to disentangle political justifications from broader comprehensive claims. Any concerns for artificial intelligence, and the use of state power to address them, therefore, must be acceptable to all reasonable citizens. One may argue that liberal perfectionism is *better* at addressing AI, by relating it to notions of flourishing or to promote certain ends (Ferdman, 2023), however, we must first attempt to see if political liberalism can coherently hold a position regarding artificial intelligence and work. Political liberalism has a strength in addressing real-world challenges due to its fundamental pluralistic character and respect for rights and democracy, which should appeal to modern, pluralistic nation-states, and a response, therefore, is necessary.

A key aspect of Rawlsian thought and political liberalism is the idea of the moral powers, best understood as capacities that persons develop and exercise. One of the moral powers is the capacity to pursue, amend, and revise one's conception of the good, and the other is the sense of justice (Rawls, 2001, pp 45-47). This is regarding how individuals determine and follow their life plans. The second is a 'sense of justice', which is defined as the ability "*to understand, to apply, and to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of political justice that specify the fair terms of social cooperation' meaning to cooperate with and live alongside others with different life plans*" (Rawls, 2001, pp18-19). These primarily form the justification for the basic liberties in the Rawlsian framework by guaranteeing conditions needed for their development and exercise (Rawls, 2001, p 335), and form a justification for the use of political power therefore which is acceptable for all reasonable persons, as all persons have an interest in developing and exercising the moral powers.

As I am discussing work, it is important to discuss meaningful work. The political liberal, especially Rawlsian, holds that people should have the opportunity for meaningful work. I am operating with the understanding that meaningful work is non-monotonous and repetitive work, where persons can form associations within or outside of their work, and they have a degree of power within the workplace (Fukuma, 2017). To elaborate further, Rawls' claimed that

*“no one need be servilely dependent on others and made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility. Each can be offered a variety of tasks so that the different elements of his nature find a suitable expression”*  
(Rawls, 1999, p464)

There is an issue in that individuals may prefer other ideas of meaningful work, i.e., they may find meaning in repetitive work, or taxing work which is well paid. However, it is consistent with accepting that one should have an *opportunity* to find work that is fulfilling from their perspective, even if they do not choose to pursue it for their own reasons, and meaningfully be able to pursue said work.

Meaningful work, arguably, ties to the pursuit of the good, as work is often a core part of individuals' identities and motivations, with many people making particular choices to find the work they desire, i.e., pursuing degrees, training, saving income to own a business, etc. Work can also afford the means to pursue other activities, for example, if one's conception of the good involves religious activities, travel, leisure, etc., they will require the time, income, and other resources to pursue said goals. We can, reasonably, make a case that meaningful work is a part of or at least significantly tied to the moral power of the ability to pursue, revise, and amend one's conception of the good. This, along with understanding the moral powers in general, establishes the grounds that I later use to formulate a coherent, political liberal response to AI and work, and understanding the issues with popular arguments.

### **3. What is Artificial Intelligence, and What Are the Concerns?**

I accept the widely used definition of artificial intelligence to mean self-improving algorithms and other autonomous processes and consider the traditional definition of machines exhibiting human-life intelligence (Helm et al., 2020.). When discussing AI within work, I mean the following types of processes (though this is non-exhaustive): employee management by applications and algorithms, particularly regarding monitoring and task allocation, suggesting allocations of goods and services to maximise certain goals, automation of tasks, and other instances where a somewhat intelligent tool is replacing a human in the workplace. Examples include automatic task assignment for gig workers on crowdsourcing platforms (Behl et al., 2021) and monitoring the productivity of said workers (Charbonneau & Doberstein, 2020), management of online platforms (Fanti et al., 2022), monitoring truck drivers' routes (Levy, 2015), allocation of tasks within factories and warehouses, such as Amazon warehouses (Delfanti, 2021), and scheduling (Vargas, 2021). There are many other potential uses in all fields, for example, AI in medical care (Verdicchio & Perin 2022) and beyond.

The worries about AI may appear to be anxieties about the nature of work. However, AI does pose a unique threat because of its somewhat autonomous nature and because it can greatly alleviate the need for as much human input as other forms of automation. Additionally, AI's proliferation is and will be, incredibly widespread, replacing and augmenting many forms of work in distinctive ways. If AI did not exist, and a worker was allocated tasks within a factory by a manager, we may claim the worker is no different to a worker in a modern office with AI management software. Both are given tasks and are seemingly unable to contest any decisions. It could be claimed that a taxi driver who picks up passengers off the street is also determined by the desires of the passenger regarding their routes. However, a worker in a factory may be able to talk with the manager directly or go to a superior. Unlike taxi drivers, ride share drivers are said to be under algorithmic control (Wiener et al., 2023), with nudging or pop-up ads to encourage certain behaviour (Scheiber, 2017). An Uber driver can be punished for refusing a long-distance fare at the end of the night in a way a traditional driver would not be. A freelancer who contacts clients online is also at the whims of their clients; however, a freelancer directly contacting clients can also refuse tasks, unlike one at the whims of an AI management software. As Edward claims, "*control is now exercised through a small, mathematically proficient elite dominating decision-making and policy by owning and controlling the 'algorithm'.*" (2020, p518). This control is different, with little agency of the worker to negotiate or engage, or even physically see, those who control them. This means that there is a uniqueness and a need for a stance on AI, separate to work, from political liberals, although the two matters intersect.

What renders AI unique from other issues of automation, which tend to replace or augment human labour, is that AI has a degree of agency by 'structuring, constraining, nudging, and encouraging different types of human behavior' (Duberry 2022, p29). There are debates as to the *extent* of agency they possess, some arguing artificial autonomous agents should be considered moral agents (Floridi & Sanders, 2004), others claiming it does not have nor should be treated the same as a human as AI does not have full autonomy (Verdicchio & Perin, 2022) or sentience (Véliz, 2021). Nonetheless, AI exhibits some degree of learning and intelligence and is often trusted by companies to actively make decisions based on the information it gathers, reducing or eliminating human input. While the issues surrounding AI do heavily relate to the issue of work, there is a distinctiveness.

There are many different concerns regarding artificial intelligence in the workplace that should interest political liberals. Many discuss how algorithms can amplify racism (Ruha, 2019), and others, including political liberals, consider issues such as algorithmic fairness from a Rawlsian position (Franke, 2021) and liberal justifications (Loi et al., 2021). Concerns more relevant to economic structure and activity, which overlap with work, are about a reduction in the availability of jobs and the polarisation of labour;

however, the concern, as it relates to equality of opportunity and meaningful work, is acceptable to address from the political liberal perspective. However, those I focus on that relate to work are concerns regarding loss of autonomy, highlighted by those such as Tiribelli (2023) and Ernst (2020), alienation, discussed by Vredenburg (2022), domination, which is often discussed concerning gig workers (Bucher et al., 2021) and surveillance (Bales & Stone, 2020) because they simultaneously are problematic for the political liberal yet raise significant concerns within work that should not be ignored. I now unpack these issues and outline issues for the political liberal.

### 3.1 Autonomy-Based Concerns

Autonomy is often seen as a valuable aspect of life. From the political liberal perspective, often the focus is on political autonomy (Rawls, 2001, p146). For example, for Rawls, coercion from the state must be limited, and the principles of justice are aimed at diminishing coercion (Rawls, 1999, p249), although earlier Rawls attached the Kantian idea of autonomy to the theory of justice (Rawls, 1999, p225). There are debates regarding how autonomy is defined, which has been claimed to be a proxy war for other claims about a conception of the good (Anderson, 2014). For example, some claim that autonomy requires an individual to pursue certain ends (Raz, 1988) or not possess certain characteristics. This already highlights an initial problem with this criticism of artificial intelligence: autonomy is a controversial, at least for the political liberal, and indeterminate concept. Nonetheless, we can understand that, in the context of work, when workers have agency and choice in their activities both within and outside of the workplace (Herr, 2021), they have *some* degree of autonomy, but to broaden the definition would be risky for the political liberal position.

AI can be, and is, seen as a threat to the idea of self-determination and autonomy as it predetermines activity and behaviour that ought to be undertaken based on algorithmic calculations. Some claim that as more processes in life are becoming digitised and automated with AI, it undermines individual freedom (Ernst, 2020). In addition, it has been said to potentially harm “moral freedom” as in the capacity to become moral agents due to artificial intelligence’s predeterministic nature, which could assess goals that are worthy for people to pursue, which determines the pursuit of said morally worthy goals (Tiribelli, 2023).

Regarding artificial intelligence and work, AI-led systems are perceived to undermine worker autonomy in various ways. For example, some claim that those who work for companies that use worker-facing software to allocate tasks, such as food delivery applications that rely on algorithmic processes (Griesbach et al., 2019), suffer from interference and a lack of flexibility. This is despite the goal of providing workers flexibility, which harms autonomy by exerting greater control (Shibata,

2020). Monitoring can be seen as undermining autonomy (Gagné et al., 2022, p249) as well, with monitoring systems monitoring activities, unpaid time can increase over paid time (Moore & Hayes, 2017), reducing not only income but also demanding workers spend more time working. Generally, task allocation via AI, due to its inflexible nature, is also said to harm autonomy (Gagné et al., 2022, p250). To illustrate, often delivery platforms do provide some relative control to workers over when they work and what tasks they complete (Griesbach et al., 2019, p13). The issue is that workers supposedly have little agency in task completion and are essentially dependent on the algorithm. Workers get some autonomy in ‘minute decisions’ but experience ‘nudging’ to align with the company’s interests, for example, many workers for one delivery service felt punished for refusing too many fares (Shapiro, 2017).

### 3.1.1 Whose Definition of Autonomy Is It Anyway?

The issue with autonomy-based arguments is that autonomy can be a broad concept, incorporating wider comprehensive claims. While even Rawls did value autonomy, to claim a worker inherently lacks autonomy when they are allocated tasks from an application or platform may undermine the real workers’ preference. For example, Griesbach et al. (2019), concluded that respondents valued the degree of autonomy offered by food delivery platforms. Herr (2021, p46) discusses one worker who values their work as a delivery driver as well, who claims:

*“No. From a technical aspect, yeah, it is dull, but traffic and the city are vibrant and in constant change, it continues on and on. You meet different people, every day, you see different streets, every day, different neighbourhoods, you get to know new restaurants, all that kind of stuff. This is what it makes so interesting to me”*

Another rider claims that the job pays more than other delivery drivers, and Herr (2021, p46) concludes that *“his job as a deliverer is not shaped by the algorithmic distribution of orders, but by crafting a bike messenger identity”*. Others have also found that drivers do feel a sense of autonomy in their work (Kidder, 2009; Fincham, 2006.) However, Herr (2021, p48) stresses that this is an ‘illusion’, which betrays a perfectionism as to what constitutes autonomy in work, although he admits *“While algorithms subordinate workers, the workers themselves might not feel this way.”* (p48). If workers feel a sense of autonomy, to claim otherwise is to claim a particular idea of autonomy that is not shared. For some workers, they may not only feel autonomy but reject the idea they lack it. If the state were to regulate this to the point of denying them the opportunity to take this kind of work, they may feel this is against their preferences. The justification would have to rely on perfectionist or comprehensive claims on what is autonomy, and what sort of work an individual should do.

The argument effectively claims that:

- P1) Workers should possess autonomy in the workplace
- P2) Workers who work with AI-based algorithms lack autonomy
- C) This work is problematic and undesirable

Premise one initially appears uncontroversial. However, there is an issue with how we define autonomy. The other main issue is in premise two, as it is unclear why we can claim these workers lack autonomy, even if they feel otherwise. This relates to the loaded conception of autonomy in premise one. The assumption is a thick conception of autonomy that may not be universally shared by all workers. Some workers may feel they have autonomy of a different nature to other workers in jobs such as couriers, or in a factory where tasks are allocated by AI. The argument can only work if they claim that one conception of autonomy is stronger, which then, in turn, relies on perfectionist ideas of what an individual must pursue in life to be autonomous. I am not, however, discounting that there is not a valid concern that AI can make it difficult for some workers to feel autonomous, nor are the issues of algorithmic control entirely invalid. However, the arguments in this form are problematic for the political liberal.

### 3.2 Alienation-Based Concerns

Alienation refers to the sense of ‘separation between a self and other that belong together’ and is associated with the Marxian and Hegelian tradition (Leopold, 2022). The concept can be broad or narrow, but there is generally a core motivation that some *subject* like individuals, groups, etc. are separate from something which they ought to be ‘in harmony with’, i.e. for Marx, workers are alienated by their labour because they are put into categories (Wood, 2004, p3). There are quasi-Marxist concerns about AI alienating humans from some aspect of their nature (Leopold, 2022), and, in relation to work more explicitly, that AI facilitates a reconstruction of the relationship of humans to labour (Sidorkin, 2024). It can appear intuitive to see how work, which is allegedly alienating, that incorporates AI may further this alienation. It may seem unusual to discuss alienation, a typically Marxian ideal, concerning political liberalism; however, it does identify certain issues, which I explain, that political liberals should take seriously, and can, drawing off work by Vredenburg (2022).

To illustrate its use concerning AI and work, Vredenburg claims “*Societies in which individuals are not fully free are societies in which they are alienated*” (2022, p3), and using the Hegelian conception, accepts individuals are alienated both by society when institutions do not guarantee conditions for their freedom, called ‘objective alienation’, and when they are “*systematically prevented from grasping the normative character of their social world regardless of the content of its normative character*” (2022,

p4), called ‘subjective alienation’. Vredenburg (p10) states that those who work as, for example, Uber drivers or on online platforms allocating tasks like crowd platforms, cannot undertake ‘practical orientation’, as in, they cannot “*directly perceive the normative character of their economic system as well as their own work*”. Workers are epistemologically unable to grasp the character of their work. This leads to alienation. These specific cases both do so because workers are allocated tasks without knowledge of the broader end result; they are overly ‘hyperspecialized’ (Vredenburg, 2022, p9). Uber drivers, additionally, cannot know the route they will take when they agree to take a driver, so they cannot undertake practical orientation, and are alienated (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Essentially, workers are unable to meaningfully conceive of their work with a larger impact, and cannot comprehend how their work fits into the scheme of things, or ascertain the nature of their work in relation to normative values.

### **3.2.1 Can Political Liberals Incorporate Alienation-Based Concerns?**

Alienation has typically been a concept from the Marxist perspective (though not necessarily), which relies on broader comprehensive claims regarding what an individual must do to self-actualise. This form of perfectionism is unacceptable. However, I accept that there is value in the concern regarding task allocation, a distance between work and output, and feeling alienated, which can negatively impact a sense of meaningful work, affirmation of the good, or being able to associate with others.

The issue of alienation appears to relate to the issue of Rawls’ conception of meaningful work, as he emphasises the importance of forming associations in the workplace as part of meaningful work (Moriarty 2009, p443). While we may claim this is itself somewhat perfectionistic, in assuming all workers will wish for labour of this nature, there is a validity that if persons are unable to form associations, and this choice is made on their behalf, their ability to pursue meaningful work is undermined. In addition, the inability to work among others and compare and contrast conceptions of the good, because the worker is isolated, is harmful to the development of the moral powers. It is crucial to be able to achieve the ‘grounds of comparison’ (Melenovsky, 2018) wherein individuals can compare their life plans to others to affirm them, i.e., meeting people of other faiths to make a meaningful choice about their own faith. In addition, some workers will wish to avoid this sense of alienation, and it is reasonable to conceive that for many workers it is something they wish to avoid, yet, they have little choice in the matter.

However, alienation arguments, even adapted to liberalism, still suffer from a loaded premise. The conception of alienation is not necessarily universally shared by all reasonable conceptions of the good. Some workers may feel alienated, and others feel free not to have to waste their time or energy on

things superfluous to their jobs, preferring to do so outside of their labour. Even if a worker feels 'alienated' to some degree, while we can make a reasonable case against individuals feeling alienated from their labour, considering it involves a significant aspect of an individual's life, there may be times when an individual is content with a degree of alienation. A worker may be content to work for higher wages or appreciate the simplicity in the work they are undertaking, providing them with the time or mental capacity to pursue whatever they want in their free time. Making decisions on behalf of individuals can factor into wider questions of what constitutes the good life and, as with autonomy, is unacceptable.

### 3.3 Domination-Based Concerns

The next issue is domination. Domination is often characterized as the capacity for arbitrary interference (Pettit, 1997, vii). While republicans define liberty as the lack of domination, liberals and liberal-republicans can and do take the concern of domination into the liberal framework (Thomas, 2016). Domination may be seen as a violation of equal status, as in, individuals are meant to have an equal status and the ability of the state or another agent to interfere violates this status, which makes it a valid liberal concern. It is important to mention that for many critical theorists, such as Forst (2012), domination can be economically and politically based, and reproduced by social systems (Forst, 2012, p2) rather than merely the capacity for arbitrary interference. Economic disparity can undermine individuals and on a global level, nations can be dominated due to debt, for example (Forst, 2012, p256).

Artificial intelligence can facilitate domination in the workplace as algorithms may have no input from the employees. If a driver for a service like Uber cannot know where a passenger wishes to go before they take the fare, they are, in a sense at the whims of the algorithmic process which will reward and punish them if they take the fare they may not wish to (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Other examples, particularly present in the 'gig economy' (Bucher et al., 2021) though also for traditional workplaces, are break allocation, hiring and firing, in addition to spying on workers (Bales & Stone, 2020), as workers have no voice in the process, while the algorithm, or employers via said algorithms, can arbitrarily interfere.

It is equivalent to situations when the lack of worker voice facilitates domination, as they are at the whims of arbitrary interference from their employers. They are at the whims, arbitrary or not, of the algorithms in task allocation, or they can penalize and monitor employees' behaviour. As some have argued, "*Big Data analytics on trade union activities should be recognised as high-risk technology. Furthermore, individual rights for employees are needed to protect them from discrimination and data*

*misuse*” (Klengel and Wenckebach, 2021). These rights are, arguably, at threat from artificial surveillance (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022). In another sense, algorithms are created with intention by the designers and as they extend the employers’ wishes, which can be dominative if the workers lack sufficient voice or ability to attest decisions, then the algorithms enforce the dominative relationship between workers and managers and bosses.

On a structural level, we can perceive a more subtle and non-agent-led form of domination via increasing amounts of AI-led processes, of work, and an economy reorienting itself around AI. For example, if more jobs utilise AI in task allocation, management, surveillance, etc., workers have little choice in the work they have and are structurally at the whims of AI, and the corporations that wield them. AI allows for greater extraction of capital without the need for hiring more labour, and it could be seen to reproduce the hierarchical and unjust aspects of present-day capitalism, by retrenching the wealth of companies, denying worker voice and agency, and depriving workers’ power on a large scale.

### **3.3.1 Should Liberals Worry About Domination and AI?**

Domination is a valid worry for political liberals, although the incorporation of domination is distinctive. Agent-led domination is a violation of equal status, and even if we reject the distinction of domination from interference, it tends to focus on non-state-based forms of interference. If a person has power over another, to the point where they cannot pursue their own goals, political liberals should recognise there is an issue. Regarding structural domination, while not typically a major concern for political liberals, though a common concern for socialist-minded republicans such as Gourevitch, (2013) or O’Shea (2020) the domination via an economic system, power dynamics, economic inequality, and political and other forms of power can arguably be characterized as a form of injustice. This is because domination denies opportunity when individuals are unable to determine what sort of work they wish and are indirectly coerced into degrading jobs, and are dependent on employers and markets. Liberals such as Scanlon (2018) have stressed the dangers of elites having dominance in society, which is a matter of inequality and justice, therefore. This concern is considerably similar in terms of identifying how power being held by a minority can undermine individual freedom and opportunity.

Domination-based arguments are not as objectionable for the political liberal as autonomy and alienation; however, they suffer a similar objection to that of alienation, in that some individuals may be content to have zero input into their workplace. While many can agree that it is an undesirable aspect and a threat to individuals, there can be at least *some cases* where an individual makes trade-

offs. If the state coerces these trade-offs, like with alienation and autonomy, it fails to satisfy the acceptability requirement. One may be dominated by artificial intelligence in the workplace; however, it may come with the benefit of other trade-offs i.e. higher salary, career progression, efficiency, etc. I accept that no one should be coerced, directly or indirectly, into a position of domination; however, there can be cases where individuals may willingly join workplaces that could be said to be dominative, on the basis that there are benefits in relation to their conception of the good. Therefore, it can be the case that for the political liberal to address AI-based domination or its wider effects, then it is making decisions on behalf of persons with perfectionistic ideals in mind regarding work, or the political liberal must accept domination. Neither appears to be a viable option.

#### **4. Can Political Liberals Adapt These Arguments?**

Many of these concerns fail to provide justifications that can be shared by all reasonable persons, meaning, any use of political power to correct these concerns fails to satisfy the acceptability requirement. The concepts of autonomy, alienation, and, to a lesser extent domination are comprehensive, and may not be universally shared by all reasonable conceptions of the good. Furthermore, individuals may be willing to trade in favour of other benefits. In this case, it appears the arguments are unacceptable to political liberals.

One response could be to ignore the concerns, to avoid any accusation of perfectionism. However, this would ignore some concerns that many persons, though not all, will accept. While some will have an idea of meaningful work or autonomy that is not shared, it does not mean there is no sense of people losing autonomy at work. The same applies to alienation, in that, as stated, people can feel their work is less meaningful or they cannot compare their life plans to others, even if we do not accept the loaded idea of alienation and I explained how we can relate issues to political liberal concerns around meaningful work, comparison etc. Regarding domination, regardless of individual perceptions, to ignore the issue is questionable as it can still identify where people are less in control of their own work and, by extension, their life, as work takes up a significant amount of time, relating to their conception of the good. It seems that there is an issue in ignoring the concern, when many workers will feel negatively impacted by the proliferation of AI in work, on account of avoiding perfectionism.

A different response is to accept the full perfectionistic implications of these arguments; however, at this point, it would be fair to call the political liberal no longer political. This risks instability and can enforce a particular ideal of work onto others. To demand that work cannot be dominative, alienating, or autonomy loss-inducing will harm certain workers' preferences regarding their work and also violate the core commitment to acceptable justifications for all. It would, essentially, appeal to a particular

idea of the good and meaningful work at the expense of others. For example, workers who are content with jobs where algorithms determine their activity for extra income or let them spend less time thinking to save energy for their interests, etc.

This leaves the political liberal with one remaining option. The solution to address them will be different, to ensure persons can make their own choices about their conception of the good, allowing for the establishment of political acts that *all* reasonable persons will agree to. This, however, will have some radical implications for how political liberals ought to approach work in general.

I now articulate a coherent political liberal stance regarding artificial intelligence based on the issues raised. I start by discussing how to address issues related to autonomy. To avoid controversial statements, political liberals should not consider broad ideas of autonomy; rather, understand it as an ability to have a degree of agency within one's work. Any broader claims which get closer to actualization will fundamentally become perfectionistic, for example, Raz's idea of autonomy, which emphasizes that self-realisation is a core component of autonomy (Raz, 1988, p369). However, being a free individual is a crucial aspect of being able to understand and develop a conception of the good life, and also to develop a sense of justice towards others (Rawls, 2001, pp45-47), a moral power.

Autonomy within a job is generally desirable by many, and if workers are coerced to accept and conduct labour that denies them the ability to have control within their labour, then there is an issue for the moral powers. If a person is constantly controlled in what they are doing, unable to make any meaningful choices, then they are not living by *their own* conception of the good, as a huge aspect of their life is now controlled. While work is often categorized as a matter of justice, labour is an essential component of an individual's life. Possessing a degree of autonomy is essential, including the freedom to leave a job, to associate with others (Rawls, 1999, p257, p373, p464), and to be able to consistently revise and amend their conception of the good (Rawls, 1999, pp45-47). Without any sense of autonomy, even the narrowest conception, an individual will struggle to meaningfully determine their conception of the good. If artificial intelligence, the use of algorithms to determine tasks, in addition to tools such as surveillance, can be shown to limit autonomy, there is a matter for the moral powers, even if some are willing to make such a trade-off. Individuals should be free to make trade-offs, and if more forms of labour deny that, then artificial intelligence can again be seen as an issue for the moral powers due to its deprivation of autonomy. Simultaneously, as some may perceive autonomy in a role others do not, these various conceptions of work autonomy must be factored into any normative demands regarding artificial intelligence. If a delivery driver feels they have autonomy, to deny this

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on some loaded conception of autonomy within work would rely on controversial claims and be unacceptable as a basis for the use of political power.

Regarding alienation, the broader ideas of alienation rely on a political morality unacceptable to the political liberal (Brighouse, 1996, pp159-160). However, if one cannot associate with others due to the alienating nature of artificial intelligence in the workplace, denying them the ability to coordinate with other workers, and if they cannot comprehend the end results of their labour (Vredenbugh, 2022), they are being denied the ability to engage with other conceptions of the good and compare their idea of work to others, and they are consistently unable to comprehend how their work fits into their conception of the good. If one has a conception of the good that heavily factors work into it, and cannot make decisions about the nature of the work due to a sense of alienation, this is a harm to the moral powers.

Nonetheless, liberalism does not typically consider the need to work as a form of coercion. This is in part because alienation is related to a Marxian idea of self-realisation, which will not be acceptable to all reasonable conceptions of the good (Brighouse, 1996, p152). People will prioritise other aspects of work over alienation, even if certain measures are in place to offset the extreme forms of alienation and degradation, and therefore, to enforce against alienation will be interfering with one's conception of the good and enforcing against trade-offs individuals may find acceptable (Brighouse, 1996, p154). However, liberalism can factor in alienation. If we do not concern ourselves with the notion of self-realization as Marx would prefer, but rather accept that "*It is quite possible to indict capitalism for its tendency to obscure the truths about how institutions work and about how to live without making a claim about the content of those truths*" (Brighouse, 1996, p159). Meaning, in other words, political liberals can accept that alienation from capitalism can be harmful without perfectionist claims. On a normative level, however, what we ought to do is ensure that there is a range of work available, including work that is not alienating in accordance with one's individual conception of alienating labour.

Domination harms the moral powers precisely because an individual must orient their life plan over another (Melenovsky, 2018, p449). An individual must be able to articulate and act on their own will to develop and revise their conception of the good. If they are at the whims of another, or structural, political, or economic forces, their agency is also denied. I accept that liberals should identify that domination picks out a form of non-liberty that they may overlook, even if it can be characterised as even liberty from interference or issues of structural domination can be categorised as matters of injustice and inequality. Domination is about the capacity for arbitrary interference from the typical

neo-republican perspective and power dynamics from the more critical theory school, and liberalism can overlook both (Pettit, 1998, p9) although they are not at odds with aiming to offset interference or inequality in general, both of which are political liberal concerns. Domination identifies the role in which private actors, rather than the state, can interfere with or exert power over an individual. Within workplaces, individuals are often under the power of employers (Anderson, 2017), and artificial intelligence particularly, can enhance this power with surveillance technology (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022), and also because algorithms determine work behaviour without a voice from the employee. When a party that can interfere has no accountability to those they can interfere with, this is broadly understood as domination and should be of concern for the political liberal. Again, as with the previous issues, some may trade off this domination for other benefits; however, it must be a genuine choice, meaning workers should have some protection from domination, which they may choose to opt out of. A worker may see no issue with having a lack of voice, preferring to earn income rather than attend frequent meetings (Tomasi, 2012, p191). The issue is if they can only work in a position of domination, as they then have no capacity to avoid it, and their moral powers are harmed.

The political liberal stance must factor in that workers will have their own reasonable ideas of what is meaningful work and conceptions of the good. Political liberals need to take seriously the issues related to alienation, domination, and autonomy in cases where individuals are unable to pursue their own conceptions of work or the good. If all work is clearly dominant or alienating, in any reasonable definition of that, then there is justification for political action. However, political liberal need not make decisions on behalf of all workers who may be content to work in jobs described as dominative or alienating, as they should be free to make their own choices.

This argument is not merely in reaction to AI. Accepting this position makes the political liberal take more seriously issues surrounding work that can come from other perspectives. However, political liberals should allow room for those who may prefer a workplace that has less worker voice, that is “dominative” or “alienating”, because it provides them with greater wealth. It does not demand that all workplaces be worker cooperatives or co-owned, or that AI cannot be used within the workplace. It demands, however, that workers should be able to opt into a workplace of their choice, to avoid the potential harms to their moral powers.

What makes this argument radical, despite some of the conclusions not a massive departure for many political liberals, is that it is recognising that a) work is a factor of people’s conceptions of the good, and b) concerns often associated with domination and alienation should matter for the political liberal. The issues of work are not merely of justice; they fundamentally relate to conceptions of the good.

Interference and lack of opportunity are not the only issues that arise, but clear issues of domination and alienation are of concern to many, though not all, workers. Persons should be able to determine for themselves the nature of the work they follow, as part of ensuring the conditions for their pursuit of their conception of the good. Either we reject the concerns surrounding AI and work, which seems peculiar when the issues I outlined are valid, accept them in the current, typical perfectionist forms, or recognise that the issues related to autonomy, domination, and alienation do in fact relate to the moral powers, even if we do not accept the full morality, and address them with a coherent, political liberal perspective, which is what I have outlined.

## **5. How to Offset the Harms and Embrace the Benefits of AI**

I have established a basis as to what can justifiably be done. The solutions are not radically new; however, the justifications are. The solutions are the provision of sufficient background conditions, potentially including a basic income, regulations, protections of worker rights, stringent protection of worker voice, and ensuring a wide range of options by protecting and promoting both individual business ownership and collective business ownership. The justification for these being that it is essential for the pursuit of meaningful work, and more importantly, the development of the moral powers. These suggestions are preliminary sketches at this stage, and require further work; however, they indicate the potential of political liberalism to address the issue of AI and work.

A strong social minimum can avoid coercion and domination, permit people to make meaningful trade-offs, and cope with the realities of a changing market and new technologies (Walker, 2014), giving workers the capacity to bargain more easily and opt out. This gives greater control within the workplace, offsetting any conception of autonomy violations, domination, or alienation. It allows the workers to make their own trade-offs and not be indirectly forced into accepting work that is harmful to their moral powers. This is likely to be a basic income. Although concerns about free riders exist (Van Parijs, 1991), research suggests that a basic income would not negatively impact employment or labor force participation (Ylikännö & Kangas, 2021). There could be other models, such as a negative income tax or other forms of basic income; however, it must be sufficient to allow the workers to determine their own preferences regarding work. The lack of conditionality means that workers would be able to work without being entirely dependent on an employer for basic goods. This recognition is a departure for Rawlsian thought; however, it is a recognition that the economic system is radically distinct and more fluid in the present day than at the time of Rawls' writing.

Worker rights and voice must be secured, especially with regard to input into AI processes, to ensure workers are not violated or alienated, or if they choose to accept a dominative workplace, they have the means to choose alternative forms of work, which relates to the social minimum. It is not to demand all workplaces be democratic, or all workers must be in a union, as these could fail the acceptability requirement and also interfere with worker preferences. The political liberal should, however, recognise that workers should have a right to voice, and the implementation of this is justifiable on the basis of moral powers. Workers can and should be free to opt-out; however, there can be more worker and union-friendly laws to allow workers to organise, and laws to ensure that algorithmic processes can be contested within the workplace. If workers prefer collective organisation or not, they have the rules to permit it, and background conditions to better negotiate. In addition to that, workers should also have the institutional support to establish collective ownership of the business. This can be done via sufficient laws to encourage loans and other methods. It will ensure a range of options to choose from, so people can make meaningful choices, control AI if they wish, and make their own trade-offs.

These are preliminary ideas, however, they give an overview of the sort of policies and institutional demands political liberals can meaningfully propose as a response to AI in work. There are other considerations such as demanding user input into company practices using AI, to offset the profit motive, stringent regulations on the use of AI altogether, and more. However, they are for further work built on the foundation developed in this paper.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I outlined the issues for the political liberal regarding common criticisms of AI and work and provided a potential political liberal response to address them. I modified the concerns for autonomy, alienation, and domination, arguing they do affect the moral powers; however, any solution must not make decisions on behalf of individuals regarding the use of artificial intelligence with regard to trade-offs which some may find acceptable. I also outlined that work, in general, relates quite significantly to the moral powers, and the issues related to autonomy, domination, and alienation of work *in general* must be considered. The position has no strong normative assumption based on controversial claims that others may reasonably reject about what kind of work is inherently desirable, preferring to give a range of options to persons. I suggested a political liberal theoretical and normative framework as a response to the issues of artificial intelligence by relating to the moral power, and considered some implications. There may be reasonable criticisms to be made; however, this serves as an initial start to a more coherent position on AI relating to work from a political liberal perspective.

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