

## Value and Alienation: A Revisionist Essay on our Political Ideals

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It is a large curiosity, indeed a perversity, that the political Enlightenment, as soon as it articulated its two great ideals of liberty and equality, proceeded with theoretical and methodological developments that put them in irresolvable tension with one another. There are many theoretical sources of this tension and I will briefly mention only two.

One source is too well-known and well-mined to bear much more than the most minimal mention, and that is the linking of the notion of *property* to a notion of the personal liberty which its ownership bestows on one, a liberty that is carried in a 'right' and therefore enshrined in the law of the land. How the possession of private property, when seen in these terms, undermines equality in the economic sphere (and therefore in other spheres) has been the subject of extensive commentary, and Marx was, of course, only its most famous and most powerful critic. As I said, this topic is so well mined that it would be to labour the obvious to say anything more about it at just this stage.

Less explicitly and familiarly mined is another feature, which I will call the '*incentivization of talent*'. It is the most natural thing in the world to think that someone's talent should be acknowledged as *hers*, and that it is *she* who should be praised and rewarded for its productions. We don't—at any rate, not in the past many centuries—simply praise and reward the zeitgeist for such productions. That would be a failure to respect someone's individuality. And with the entrenchment of a conception of liberty as a form of *individual* self-governance, one's liberty to reap the fruits of one's talent became quite as prominent and taken for granted as the other liberties. Notions such as 'dessert' thus also get linked to one, among other, rights possessed by individuals. This goes so deep in our thinking that it is likely to be considered an hysterical egalitarian ideologue's artifice to deny it. Denying it seems to fly in the face of our intuitive understanding of what it is to be an *individual* (rather than just a symptom of the zeitgeist in embodied human form), it violates what we conceive to be the *liberty* of an individual to reap the praise and rewards of the exercise and efforts of his talents, not to mention the liberty of *others to enjoy* the productions of these efforts at their most excellent because they are *incentivized* to be as excellent as they can be. But, like the liberty attaching to possession of property, this way of thinking of liberty as attaching to talent, also promotes social and economic inequality. This second feature of liberty attaching to the idea of talent is less structurally central to our culture than the liberty that is tied to property, but it perhaps goes even deeper psychologically and the dichotomy it generates with equality is, therefore, more subtly troubling; and it seems just as impossible to overcome.

There are several other features of the political philosophy we have inherited that one could summon to present the tension between liberty and equality, and I have mentioned only these two just to give a completely familiar sense of how far such

thinking has gone into our sensibility, how entrenched it is in the very way we deploy these terms, and how, therefore, it would seem almost to change the semantics of the terms if we were to think that the tension could be removed or resolved. That is to say, if we managed to see them as not being in tension, it would only be because, as Thomas Kuhn might have put it, we have changed the *meanings* of the terms ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’, not because we have produced an improved theory or politics *within* the framework of the Enlightenment. Within that framework things are, on this score, unimprovable. In other words, what I mean by framework here is perhaps one of the (diverse) things that Kuhn meant by his term ‘paradigm’ and, if so, clearly we need to shift to another framework if we are ever going to remove the tension between these two notions. In such a new framework, neither ‘liberty’ nor ‘equality’ would *mean* what they mean in the framework of Enlightenment thought, no more than ‘mass’ in Einstein’s physics meant what it meant in Newtonian mechanics, if Kuhn is right.

How might such a shift in framework be sought? Here is a proposal. Let’s, as a start, usher the very ideals of liberty and equality off centre-stage. If this is to disinherit an entire tradition of liberal thought of the Enlightenment, so be it. Once these are exeunt, we need to replace them on centre-stage with a third, more primitive, concept; that is to say, a concept more fundamental to our social and political life than even liberty and equality. And this is to be done with the idea that ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’ may *subsequently* be introduced once again –by the back door, as it were-- but now merely as necessary conditions for the achievement of this more basic ideal that occupies the central position. So re-introduced, there is reason to think that these terms may have undergone substantial revision in their meaning, and thus may not any longer express concepts that are at odds with one another.

We need, then, to fasten on an appropriately more fundamental concept. To be more fundamental than concepts such as liberty and equality which have been so central to our theoretical understanding of politics, it would have to track something not necessarily older and more traditional in our political understanding so much as something that speaks more immediately to our experience and our ordinary lives, and I suggest that a natural concept and ideal on offer for this role is that of an *unalienated life*.<sup>1</sup>

What is that?

The term ‘alienation’ has had a remarkable elaboration in the early work of Marx and though that remains very much in the back of my mind as I proceed now, I will not, in these remarks to come, be speaking at the level of specificity that Marx does, tying the phenomenon centrally, as he does, to the experience and consciousness of the population of wage-labourers in particular. I will instead step back and speak of alienation at a much higher level of generality. Moreover, as Marx himself and many others discuss it, alienation takes many forms and has many aspects, but, given the level of generality at which I am addressing the issue, I will focus only on one, in my view very central form and aspect, that it possesses.

Here is how I’ve allowed myself to think of it.

It’s hard to say what an ‘unalienated life’ is in any direct statement that elaborates a definition, so I will come to it indirectly by trying to uncover the thinking, the mentality, that underlies the sources by which liberty (as it got attached to property and talent) grew to be in tension with equality in our standard orthodox liberal traditions.

One can convey the thinking in a variety of ways, but let me do so by a brief consideration of one prominent strand in the intellectual history by which the attaching of liberty to property, in particular, came to be seen as a form of moral and political achievement, elevating what was happening hitherto by predatory force in the enclosures movement, into a form of right and rationality. In the Early Modern period one particular social theory argued with clarity and with the force of the great intellect of its propounder for the political *rationality* and therefore the historically progressive *necessity* of transforming nature not merely as a site of living and livelihood, but as a resource for a specific form of gain, what in our time we call agribusiness as against mere agrarian living. (The claimed rationality is repeatedly invoked to this day as the basis for further claims that the rest of the world, including Europe's erstwhile colonized lands, would have to inevitably adopt these rational political and economic arrangements as a historically progressive and therefore *necessary* form of development. Alas, even so humane an economist as Amartya Sen has recently done so, an indication of how widespread the grip of this liberal assumption about political rationality is.<sup>ii</sup>)

This theory was contractualist in conception. There are, of course, several powerful strands in social contract theory –Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau..., and Rawls and Nozick in our own time, to name only the most well known. On the questions I have just raised, the strand that is relevant is the one that owes to John Locke.<sup>iii</sup> I will focus on this strand. The point of all social contract theory, whether Lockean or any other, is to establish that in an originary scenario described as 'the state of nature' (in a later idiom and theory, 'the original position'), which is a pre-political condition, *freely chosen consent* by a people to certain principles or arrangements to live by immediately transforms those people into citizens, and the state of nature into a polity --but it only does so, if the consent to those principles and arrangements is demonstrated to be rational in a very specific way: the principles and arrangements freely consented to must make these people *better off* as citizens than they hitherto were as mere people, prior to politics, in a state of nature. Thus, there are two conditions that must be met to ensure the rationality of the outcome. The principles and arrangements contracted into must make us *better off* and our implicit consent to them must be seen as a *freely* made consent.

In the strand I am concerned with the canonical scenario has it that were someone in a state of nature to come upon a stretch of land in the common and fence it and register it at an elementary form of office that they set up for this kind of registry, then the land becomes *his* (obviously, no other pronoun is apt given the time in which the theory was first propounded). Suppose then that this is done by some of the people and they each keep faith with (a somewhat fuller statement of) the first general requirement I mentioned above –viz, that this can only be done if no one is made worse off and at least some are made better off than they were in the state of nature-- a requirement which they then elaborate further by adding the following crucial clause: if those who had done this were then to hire others, who did not, at wages which enable them to live better as well, then this too would be an arrangement that is justified since they too are in fact better off than they were in the state of nature.

Such was the explicit claim of the Lockean ideal of the social contract (roughly an argument from Pareto-improvement) which went on to become the cornerstone for certain political principles and arrangements that came to be called liberalism in which among other things such as free speech (except for atheists, Catholics,...), private

property and wage labour were seen as progressive advances justified by the mutual advantage or amelioration of *all* concerned (or in the limiting case, amelioration for some and no resulting *disadvantaging* of anyone else).

When one asks the question, what in the historical context was motivating the articulation of such a contractualist theory, the answer has to be that the theory philosophically consolidated the system of enclosures which, as I said, had been practiced by brute force for many decades earlier, and in doing so it prepared the ground for it to become a form of right with law and governance to back it up. The point was to present the political principles and arrangements which justified the system of enclosures as a moral and political achievement since it was based on a form of rational and freely chosen consent that generated a compact that created a citizenry in its inhabitation of nature and its relation to the sources of livelihood and production, and the polity to sustain it in these relations.

Marx's 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of Capital,<sup>iv</sup> which presented in critical detail the predatory nature of such primitive accumulation in general, but also of the enclosures in England in particular, had its premonitional anticipation in the widespread protest against the enclosures among some of the radical groups during the English revolution who predated Locke but whose protest on behalf of a quite different ideal of the collective cultivation of the existing commons can be seen as seeking to pre-empt the claim to rationality in Locke of such an implicit consent that he had attributed to all in the originary scenario of a state of nature. Let me then construct a specific counter-argument against the Lockean contract and attribute it (completely anachronistically, of course, since these dissenters predated Locke) to these dissenters as the theoretical source of their protest and as proposing instead an *alternative notion of consent*. So, someone like Winstanley could have been heard as anachronistically saying: "The entire contractualist scenario as you have presented it generates an opportunity cost. An opportunity cost is the cost of an avoided benefit paid for making a certain choice. That avoided benefit is the collective cultivation of the commons that is prevented by the choice to privatize the land in your initial step in the scenario. Once the step is taken, it is true what you say that those who were hired for wages are better off than they were in *the state of nature* but they are not better off than they *would have been* if the land had not been privatized in the first place and if there was a collective cultivation of the commons instead."

The criticism is based on a relatively simple counterfactual. But despite its simplicity, its theoretical effect is complex and interesting because, as I said, it proposes a quite different notion of consent than the one that Locke assumes. Consent must now be viewed as a more complicated act than Locke understands, it should be viewed as follows: Whether someone can be said to have consented is not necessarily to be viewed as this tradition proposes but rather viewed as what he or she *would choose in antecedently specified sorts of conditions that do not obtain* —in which case the entire Lockean tradition of thought may be assuming that we have implicitly rationally consented to something which we in fact have not.

If in this way we shift the focus of this imagined dispute between the pre-emptive Winstanley and Locke to a dispute about which notion of implicit consent is at stake in the social contract, a further issue opens up about the nature of freedom and coercion. Suppose that Locke were to respond by saying: "I have offered a perfectly good notion of implicit consent and I see no reason to accept yours." Winstanley's response would then

presumably have to be: “If you ignore my counterfactual and insist that the sense of consent you have on offer suffices in the contractarian scenario and that everyone has indeed implicitly consented in that sense, then I will have to point out that the implicit consent you have attributed in particular to those who are hired to work for wages, was *coerced* by a condition that they could not avoid, their non-possession of the land (in the face of the possession of the land by others). *My* alternative notion of consent was articulated with the view to establishing that that non-possession (in the face of possession by others) should be seen as avoidable. Thus, your insistence on your notion of consent, even despite the assertion of my counterfactual, brings out in the open that possession of the land by some and not others is a coercive condition in which the latter has to ‘consent’ in *your sense* of the term. And so the contractualist tradition presents a *coerced* implicit consent fraudulently as a *freely chosen* implicit consent.”

I had said earlier that a great deal of social theory presented the developments in political economy in the Early Modern period as advances in political *rationality*; and that it was this claim of rationality which was invoked as the basis for recurring further claims over the centuries down to our own time that the rest of the world should adopt these rational political and economic arrangements as a historically progressive and therefore *necessary* form of development. But, if I am right, the premise of the argument, i.e., the claim to the rationality of the contractual ideal that philosophically rationalizes historical developments (initially) in England, depends on two things: a) on what is consented to making one better off than one was in the state of nature and b) the consent being freely made. And if the criticism attributed as implicit in Winstanley’s dissenting stances is correct, *these two conditions cannot be satisfied jointly*. The counterfactual notion of consent offered by Winstanley’s implicit criticism makes clear that the first requirement has not been met, and if you simply deny the counterfactual notion of consent, the Lockean notion of consent fails to meet the second requirement that the consent be freely chosen.

Does this argument suffice to undermine Locke’s contractualist conclusion? It would be premature to think so since Locke’s account has been implicitly fortified in more recent times, by theoretical developments in the liberal tradition that I am addressing.

I have argued that Locke’s argument for privatization of property, when fully laid out, has a rebuttal in an argument from opportunity cost that can be attributed (anachronistically) to the radical puritan dissenters. The rebuttal I attributed made counterfactual use of the ideal of a *collective cultivation of the commons*. This was essential to the argument. But it is not as if the long tradition of liberal theory which that rebuttal was targeting (a tradition in which Locke was only a very early influential founding figure) did not deploy *further* conceptual resources to try and undermine this ideal of the commons that was essential to my efforts. So, I now want to address one central strand of such resources which updates the Lockean picture in *contemporary* liberal assumptions with a fortifying argument that, I believe, can only be rebutted by invoking considerations having to do with human subjectivity and alienation.

Perhaps the most standard resource that liberal theory relies on is the idea and argument behind what has come to be called the ‘tragedy of the commons’, which in its more sophisticated form is formulated in terms of a multi-person prisoners’ dilemma.<sup>v</sup> The idea is to raise as an intractable problem for any ideal of cooperative life, such as

collective cultivation of the commons (or in our own time the pressing concern about the preservation of the environment -fresh air, say, being the relevant common). The intractable problem that is supposed to arise is that individual human psychology at its most rational is required to behave in ways that undermine the collective by failing of the cooperation needed to keep it going. This is because the collective ideal asks the individual to contribute resources (sometimes restraint may be a negative form of contribution of resources, when the goal is, say, to prevent overuse or over-cultivation of the common) that produce a benefit that is shared by and therefore divided over the whole collective while the cost is borne by each individual. If everybody does what is required of him or her, of course everyone gains. But since one is in the epistemic dark about whether others are contributing their bit of the resources demanded of them, one is constantly filled with qualm that one's contribution would be wasted if others don't do their bit. In such an understanding of the collective ideal --which is pervasive in liberal frameworks of social thought-- some individual commoner who decides not to cooperate therefore is always at an advantage since the gains of non-cooperation will accrue all to oneself and they will be immediate as well as assured, whereas the gains from cooperating will be divided over the whole group and will be long-term and, as just said, uncertain because the cooperation of others cannot be taken for granted. Non-cooperation for him, as an individual, would thus be rational. But the common cannot survive if each individual commoner does this individually rational thing. It is doomed. Thus the tragedy. So privatization is a better bet.

In recent years, Elinor Ostrom, has responded to this argument of the tragedy of the commons by claiming that it should not be seen as an argument for privatization of the land of the commons, but rather as an argument for the regulation of the commons by policing, detection, and punishment. (I am focusing only on one lesson intended in her work, *Governing the Commons*, which is an impressively detailed and effective antidote to the scare tactics of an impending tragedy. The seven principles of common pool resource governance that she lays down are drawn from close empirical work done in a number of commons in several different continents, which show the spectre of tragedy to be highly exaggerated.) Now, it would be foolish to deny that regulation via policing, detecting, and punishment of non-cooperation is a good thing and should be deployed to avoid a tragedy that owes to non-cooperation. And no one has presented a more convincing alternative picture to the prevailing liberal consensus around Hardin's paper than Ostrom.

But what I'd like to do is to ask what a philosopher is bound to ask: what are the underlying lessons for the *mentality* that must underlie any alternative approach to the commons, if we are not to be browbeaten by the argument from tragedy. The reason for this is that, quite apart from the well-known difficulties of detecting many non-obvious forms of non-cooperation, the real problem is that the *same multi-person prisoners dilemma style argument* can be raised for *why anyone should cooperate with policing and punishment* if he can get away with *not* cooperating ---by offering bribes, for instance, or making mafia style threats against those who detect and police or those who cooperate with the policing and detecting..., or, in political cultures which congratulate themselves on having outgrown a culture of bribes and threats, by loopholing the law. The deeper and underlying flaw in the 'tragedy of the commons' idea lies in its basic way of thinking and that can't be rectified by solutions like 'regulation' and policing, solutions which are

vulnerable to the same strategy of argument that generated the ‘tragedy of the commons’ in the first place.

Without probing beyond the idea of regulation and policing and punishment, however laudable and necessary such regulation is, and without seeking an alternative *outlook* to the liberal notion of rationality that is found in the tradition from Locke down to Hardin, it will rightly be said that Locke, anticipating this argument of the tragedy, was correct to see his version of the implicit consent of all contractors (possessors and non-possessors of land) as rational, indeed *even freely chosen* if the contractors had an implicit or tacit understanding of the looming threat of the ‘tragedy of the commons’. By contrast, it will be said, the counterfactual-based notion of implicit consent that I have put in the mouth of Winstanley and the dissenters, which vitally depends on the possibility of a collective and cooperative cultivation of the commons, is hobbled precisely by the fact of a looming ‘tragedy’ of the commons, unless a more fundamental critique is provided of the thinking involved in the very formulation of the argument that there is a tragedy that looms.

It is just here that the ideal of an unalienated life begins to surface in relevance to identify the deeper flaw.

So I ask again, what is this ideal of an unalienated life? And I am a little better situated to spell that out (though it will have to be brief in a paper that is already quite long) keeping in mind the eventual task I have set myself --of defending the counterfactual-based notion of consent of the dissenters against Locke’s notion of implicit consent and against the particular way of thinking that generates the tragedy of the commons that would sustain and fortify Locke’s idea of such a consent to a privatized economy.

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The first thing to note is that the term ‘an unalienated life’ even as I have wielded it is ambiguous. One sense of it is the unalienatedness that came with the sense of *belonging* that was made possible by the social frameworks of a period prior to modernity. All political and social theorists, including Rousseau and Marx, have tended to agree that whatever the defects of societies prior to modernity were, alienation was not among the defects. But the point remains that, as is well known and widely acknowledged by the very same theorists, the unalienated life of those earlier times was deeply marred by the oppressive defects in those societies. (To say ‘feudal’ to describe that form of oppression would be merely to use a *vastly* summarizing and somewhat misleading category that we have all been brought up on.) It is precisely those defects that the sloganized ideals of liberalism, Liberty and Equality, were intended as *directly* addressing. And I have argued that since the methodological and theoretical framework within which those two concepts were then developed made it impossible to so much as conceive how they could be jointly implemented, we should no longer see them as something to be *directly* deployed, but rather as indirectly deployed --merely as necessary conditions for the achievement of a quite different (directly deployed) ideal-- thereby transforming the concepts of liberty and equality. Now, if the achievement of an ideal of an unalienated life were to bring, in its wake-- *indirectly* --conditions of liberty

and equality (however transformed), it is bound to be very different from the unalienated life which is acknowledged to have existed in times prior to modernity because the conditions in which it existed then were also acknowledged to be acutely *lacking* in, precisely, liberty and equality. Thus, given this rudimentary conceptual dialectic, what we need to show is how a new framework that breaks out of the dialectic would solve for *three* things at once –a transformed notion of liberty and equality, as I have said from the outset, *but also it would now seem a transformed notion of the unalienated life*. So, this is to be conceived as a holistically *triangular* transformation --we overcome a certain conceptual-historical dialectic and in doing so *together and at once transform all three concepts* that feature in the dialectic.

To do this vastly ambitious thing, we have to ask, first, what can be retained of the general idea of social ‘belonging’ of an earlier time in any revision of the idea of an unalienated life for our own time? We know from the other elements of the dialectic that the social belonging of an earlier time was marred by the defects of a lack of liberty and equality, but we also know from what I have said that the attempts to directly overcome those defects were, in turn, marred by the fact that liberty and equality flowered in conception within a social framework in which a highly *individualized* notion of individual liberty that attached to property and talent made for liberty’s conceptual incoherence with equality. *That* was the fundamental source of the shortcoming of the liberalism that emerged out of the standard political Enlightenment. So it would seem logical then, given this entire dialectic, to conclude that a concerted and triangulated transformation of all three notions would have to find its first hook, find its initial roots, in *individual* liberty being conceived in non-individualistic terms. It is only such a notion, I think, that could be of a piece with the ideal of an unalienated life.

Liberty, in its broadest and most intuitive sense, is the idea of self-governance, the power to make the decisions that shape the material and other aspects of our lives. If so, it would seem then that to transform the notion of liberty in the way that we have just seen as being required, we would have to envisage each individual as approaching these decisions not primarily with her own interests in mind but the interests of everyone in society. Now, the last few words of that last sentence express something utterly familiar, a cliché, a piety. The critique of self-interest has long been with us. Moreover since my goal is to show the shortcomings of the argument from the tragedy of the commons which is manifestly based on individual rationality as conceived in terms of individual self-interest, it is not all that interesting to just *say* that one is opposed to self-interest. But I am *not* merely saying that one should be opposed to self-interest. I am hoping that I am saying something more interesting because I think it is far less well known and hardly at all theoretically developed that what such a critique of self-interest amounts to *is the construction of a notion of liberty*.

Why is that little known and developed? I repeat: Because individual self-governance (i.e., liberty) has for so long been viewed in individualistic terms. But what is it to have a *non-individualistic* conception of *individual* self-governance? Just to be clear: it is *not* group or collective self-governance, which is a different notion (interesting in a different way) but not relevant to liberty which is felt and exercised by individuals (as indeed is alienation). Rather it is something like this. And here I return to the meta-ethical conclusion of Section 1 that I have held in reserve.

The world (both the natural and the social world) I have said contains value properties that present us with perceptible normative demands to which our (practical) agency must respond. If this is so, then, as Aristotle first suggested implicitly in the various ingredients that go into his notion of phronesis, we have to *see the world right*, to *see correctly* what its normative demands are. The point is essentially phenomenological (a further reason not to see this part of the argument as merely being a repudiation of self-interest). And to be unalienated, I believe, is for our agency to be in responsive sync with these perceptually presented normative demands coming from the world as we apprehend it, when we apprehend it correctly. That is what it is to be at home in the world --to be sensitive in our perception to the demands that the value elements in the world make on us and to respond suitably with our agency to those demands. And the centrally important point then is that for one to *see* these demands of the *world* for what they are, *one's own orientation* to the world in viewing the normative demands of its value-laden layout has to be primarily through the lens not just of one's individual point of view but from a larger point of view.

Consider a physical analogy that needs to be extrapolated to the social ---how when one (an individual) drives a car one orients oneself perceptually to the demands of the road ahead not from the point of view of *one's own individual body* but from the point of view something larger than one's individual body, that of the *whole car*. This is obvious when one considers how when (say, before one starts the car to drive) one turns to talk to someone sitting next to one in the car, one's orientation to the world is from the point of view of one's own individual body onto the world (to the person next to one). It is only when one turns away and looks ahead to the road to drive that one's orientation towards the world is not at all from the point of view of one's individual body but rather navigating and responding to the demands of the world from a larger point of view, the point of view of the car. If that transition did not happen, one would crash the car. In a sense, then, with the proper extrapolation of this bodily analogy to the social, the tragedy of the commons is akin to the tragedy of such a car crash.

In the dialectic I have set up in this paper, the idea of such a larger orientation when extrapolated from this physical or bodily example of the car to the *social*, has a very significant outcome. Even though it may involve the mentality and agency of individuals, because they each exercise their *liberty* or self-governance in perceiving and agentively responding from the point of view something larger, the social or collective orientation of each individual to the world (seeing the world's demands from the point of view of the collective), is bound to *internally* cohere with equality in its outcomes. For equality would on this picture not be seen as something *extra or further* that is conceptually configured as something to be navigated in terms of a trade-off with liberty, but rather as *built-into* the deliverances of the exercise of *liberty* itself, when the exercise of liberty is the exercise of a mentality in this form of unalienated agentive responsiveness to the normative demands of the 'world', properly perceived along the lines I've just briefly sketched. (I want to make clear, what should in any case perhaps be obvious, that my theoretical motives here are not to deliver equality itself--no mere philosophical argument could do that--but to remove the chronic trade-off relations between these two ideals that are found in the liberal tradition that I am trying to reconfigure and transcend.)

If all three notions, liberty, equality, and the unalienated life are triangulated in this way together, we have a notion of unalienatedness that is not the same as the one of pre-modernity with its absence of liberty and equality, and we have a notion of liberty that is not generative of inequalities unlike in the liberal framework where it is individualistically conceived (in the form that attaches to talent and property) but rather non-individualistically conceived in the way that I have just outlined. In this new framework or paradigm, it is quite impossible to even so much as raise the difficulties that lead to the tragedy of the commons. To even so much as have the qualm, ‘Would my efforts and contributions to the collective cultivation (or restraint from over-cultivation) be wasted if others don’t also contribute?’ *is already to be thoroughly alienated*, by the lights I have set up in the ideal of the unalienated life I have just presented. If this is right, then it should follow that if one pursues the path of this dialectic I have set up about how to reconfigure a trio of ideals, the tragedy of the commons far from fortifying Locke simply exposes how Locke’s notion of consent has no superior rationality to my imagined Winstanley’s alternative notion of consent.

Let me come to the significance of this point about the unalienated life from a different angle –by seeking an extension of Wittgenstein’s idea of a ‘basic action’. Wittgenstein, after the discussion of a celebrated example, had concluded that an individual’s *basic* intentional action is an action you do and there is no other action you do in virtue of which you do it. In the example, he asked: what is the difference between my waving to a friend and my arm going up. He had in mind to criticize philosophers who say that the intentional act of waving (to a friend, say) is to be considered as follows. There is something more conceptually *basic*, the physical arm going up (or my moving my physical arm). Then an intention (or further intention) *accrues* to this basic element and that accretion conceptually transforms it into a waving to a friend. By contrast, he insisted the right view is that what is basic is the *waving to a friend*. Full stop. That’s it. It (the intentional act, the waving) has *no conceptual breakdown* into other more basic elements and accruals upon them.

Wittgenstein, in formulating the notion of a basic action, was concerned with the idea of individual *intentionality*. And I am asking, whether there might be an extension of Wittgenstein’s thinking here, regarding the notion of a basic action, that reflects an idea of individual sociality? One might even, straining what Wittgenstein calls ‘logical grammar’, say this: Wittgenstein was interested in individual intentional action, and my effort to extend his idea of a basic action is to find it relevant also to individual social action (The last three words seem so odd to us only because our conceptual frameworks are impoverished by the fact that the idea of an unalienated life is not --where I’ve been struggling in this paper to place it—on *centre-stage*.) A phenomenology of the normative demands coming from the value properties in the world by *seeing* them from an orientation larger than our own, I am suggesting, might help with the extension. That was the point of the bodily analogy with seeing the world from the point of view of the car rather than one’s own individual body. If the social version of that phenomenology were in place, an individual’s liberty-constituting or self-governing actions would not emerge from a more basic form of thinking that is present in the formulation of the tragedy of the commons argument. The tragedy of the commons argument, the very idea of such a tragedy, is only intelligible within a framework that assumes that if there is any idea we have of the social, *it is built up via accruals attaching to a more basic form of*

*thinking*; and it is this form of thinking, which is then pervasively taken for granted and become the basis for the argument that leads to the tragedy, just as the idea of the intentional (in the view that Wittgenstein repudiates) is built up on accruals attaching to something more basic.

This implies that to even have the qualm: “what if I were to do my bit and other’s didn’t?” would be akin to saying that the arm movement is having a qualm about the waving to a friend, an incoherent idea if ever there was one. I mean this quite literally. In an unalienated life and society, that qualm (what if I did my bit and others didn’t?) which underlies the rationality that fuels the tragedy of the commons is *literally* as incoherent and unintelligible as the arm movement being said to have a qualm about the waving. And nothing short of establishing that incoherence captures the ideal of an unalienated life. To be unalienated is to be free of a certain malaise, but since that malaise gets a rather abstract description, to be ‘unalienated’ itself must be understood in relatively abstract terms. It is not to have sympathy or feel fraternity with others or to show solidarity towards others (see footnote iv below), good though it is to have and do that --not all good things are the same good thing! Rather, it is to be free of way of thought in which --when we make the decisions we make in governing ourselves as individuals in the exercise of our liberty-- we do not just find it wrong but we cannot even find it *so much as intelligible* or coherent to have the qualm in question that leads to the tragedy, suggesting that game-theory is itself a higher-order symptom of our alienation; and to be free of that way of thought is simply (well, ‘simply’ is an ostentatious bit of rhetoric here) the other side of a fitting phenomenology of value. To *see* the world and its value properties that make normative demands on us aright and to overcome alienation are not two things but one.

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<sup>i</sup> There is a great temptation here, though a glib one (owing to a pre-existing trio of ideals within the Enlightenment) to suggest ‘fraternity’ instead of ‘the unalienated life’ as the more basic ideal for what I want to say. The temptation should be resisted for a wide variety of reasons that I will not present here. Those reasons would also show why the notion of sympathy in Hume and Adam Smith (which is meant to be part of a picture of values that stands opposed to the picture presented in Section 1 of this paper) is quite the wrong notion with which to theoretically develop the notion of an unalienated life. I hope to develop those reasons in a sequel to this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, even so humane an economist as Amartya Sen in his, ‘Prohibiting the Use of Agricultural Land for Industry is Ultimately Self-Defeating’, [The Telegraph](#) (Kolkata) July 23, 2010, said against those who protested the ‘eminent domain’ dispossession of the peasantry of rural Bengal and other tribal foresters of the commons in various parts of the

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country: “England went through its pain to create its Londons and Manchesters, India will have to do so too.”

<sup>iii</sup> John Locke, Second Treatise on Government Nicholson Press, 2013. First published in 1689

<sup>iv</sup> Karl Marx, Capital vol 1, Penguin Books 1976. First published in 1867.

<sup>v</sup> Garrett Hardin’s “The Tragedy of the Commons” Science, 1968, is the classic paper.