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SOME REFLECTIONS ON MAN AND WORK

A translation by E. Créereaux, and Justine Harris of Dr. Erpicum's article, Quelques Réflexions sur l'Homme et le Travail, that appeared in the January issue of *Canadian Counsellor/Conseiller Canadien.*

In discussing the union between man and work, we have an impression that we are reliving an old story of a forced marriage, a forced marriage bonded by a curse that remains unchanged from the earliest times: "You will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow . . .".

Whether he has liked it or not, man has gone his way in the exacting companionship of work. At various times and places he has adapted to this companionship with varying degrees of success — sometimes by delegating the most arduous tasks to those less fortunate or more servile, sometimes by transfiguring work into a material or a moral goal, to which work is really but the means, sometimes — more often — by accepting work as a daily reality exterior to himself, which allows him to discover himself in exchange and dialogue.

In our western society, and especially in the nordic countries, men and work, even if on occasion they do tend to repel each other, nevertheless maintain mutual respect and can rarely do without each other. Work always catches up with the man attempting to escape it, and the man without work cannot rest until he has found it once again. The worth of work in our society has become so great that women, who in the past were not compelled to work outside their homes, now work in increasing numbers — housekeeping and child care do not seem to be sufficient to bring about self development to the same extent as it is brought about in men.

Here then is an extraordinary transformation that poses for counselors not only the question of finding jobs, but also the problem of understanding the goals of those who are searching for jobs. Beyond the simple aptitude necessary to carry out a task, it is necessary to find the man who should realize himself in work for his own benefit as well as that of society.

What is the natural motivation of a man who works, and what are the social influences that drive him to work? This will be the topic of a brief discussion as we consider work, man, and the man-work union.

1. WORK

Until the 16th century, the French word "travail" retained only the depressing connotation found in its Latin origin: "travail" is derived from the common Latin word *tripaliare* meaning "to torture" by using a *tripalium,* a device used for subduing animals. Even today the concept of work is not divorced from connotations of suffering and pain, but it is undeniably valued. Its virtues have been extolled by philosophers, economists, and sociologists, and have been acted out in a "working world" where work takes on a high moral value.

Work is no longer servitude, and in many cases it is the source of personal dignity and social respect. "Work is glorious and noble. It gives a self-confidence which even inherited wealth cannot give," was the way it was described as early as 1837 by de Vigny, the aristocratic poet.

In order to fully understand what work is, and its true nobility, and also the false values that may prostitute it, it is necessary to elaborate its three components: activity; a non-immediate goal or delayed reward; and, frequently, constraint. It is only when the first two, and often the third, unite that we can speak of work. Picking a fruit to eat is not work. There is activity, the constraint of hunger, but an immediate goal or reward. Harvesting fruits, sorting them, selling the best and keeping the rest for jams in order to make a profit — these are work. There is activity and *delayed* reward. Constraint is economic, social, or psychological.

The activity component of work is the easiest. It is simply a necessity, occurring in leisure activities as well as in imposed tasks. All forms of life are active. Work becomes laborious only when it is done under constraint.

The delayed reward is most exacting. It requires thought and anticipation of results and appreciation of the value of the action. When it is detached from action, there is a danger of devaluing the human value of work so that it becomes only a means to an end — an end which is alienated from the action.

When work was reduced to a point at which it was *only* defined by production capacity or by yield, or when it became an amorphous concern without any real contacts with the human worker, the worker developed little more interest in his work than does the merchant in the objects he sells (Daniel-Rops, 1937).

Constraint is not solely negative — it is a positive stimulus to useful action. It is painful and brutalizing only in the instance of a servile obligation to perform routine tasks whose goal is not evident, or to perform tasks that leave an individual in complete ignorance of the role he plays in doing the work. The stone cutter in the middle ages, while he handled the chisel and hammer, could anticipate, as he hewed the stone, the beauty of the cathedral to which he was making a contribution. Despite the primitive methods he used, the tangible beauty evident in his participation involved him in his activity and rewarded it. In his simple task, his art inscribed itself and remained permanently visible in the aesthetic totality of his work.

In work activity acquires a nobility, which it possesses nowhere else, when it is determined less by constraint or the delayed economic reward, and more by the joy of making one's own creation. Arduous though the task may be, it is nevertheless transfigured by the inexpressible joy of creating.

"The world will be enlightened by a new day, the day when I see in work the source and the essence of values (Beauvoir, 1960)."

This joy in "beautiful work" requires a certain freedom of action. Marxist or capitalistic economies, which make work serve an objective of productivity and welfare much too remote from individual activity, can destroy this joy, and thus make work a relentless slavery.

Through its anticipated goal and a kind of creative dialogue between it and things, work acquires its nobility. Man finds joy and a kind of blos-

soming in it — if he is not coerced without the possibility of leaving in his work the personal mark of his industry — while at the same time revealing himself to himself. "We do not find meaning in things; we do not put it in things; *it evolves itself between us and things* (Buber, 1959)."

To consider things — for example work-activity — in a non-immediate perspective of personal blossoming and service to society is surely more valuable than to be coerced only by the economic aspect of work. But there is still an arbitrariness about it which is not free, but is subject to a means-end system. The real dignity of work is in itself, as a reality separate from the man who often has a very precarious freedom in choosing it.

The man who believes in his destiny exists no more for work than work exists for him. But between himself and work, in the completely common reality of his daily life, he can begin a dialogue in which he discovers himself offered to work, and discovers work offered to him.

2. MAN

In what way does man's nature predispose him to work? Is it a necessity? Can he find fulfillment elsewhere?

Rather than answer these questions prematurely and in generalities, it may be stated at this point that "man" is an abstraction which the counselor finds only in his manuals. The man or the woman, the young man or the young girl encountered in consultation are individuals with unique personalities.

For many people the problem of satisfying or not satisfying the basic needs of their natures is less common than the need for survival and development in the environment in which they find themselves. At the lower limits of pauperism in our society, the one real problem is to find a remunerative job, entirely integrated to breadwinning. And this represents an optimal goal, which Harrington (1962) describes lucidly in the following example:

> The poor get sick more than anyone else in society. *That is because they* live in slums, jammed together under unhygienic conditions; they have inadequate diets, and cannot get decent medical care. When they become sick, they are sick longer than any other group in the society. Because they are sick more often and longer than anyone else, they lose wages and work, and find it difficult to hold a steady job. And because of this, they *cannot pay for good housing, for a nutritious diet, for doctors. At* any given point in the circle, particularly when there is a major illness, their prospect is to move to an even lower level *and to begin the cycle,* round and round, toward even more suffering (p. 15).

For these people, the minimum welfare necessary for any further development of their human nature is not attained. While, as everyone else, they are members of humanity, they are mentally separated and generally do not possess the necessary resources to emerge on their own; they need external material aid and psychological assistance. They need to learn anew to be men, and not pariahs.

But, what is it to be a man?

On the average and in the usual manner, to be a man is to have animal life and its instincts, to have a human physical appearance and human means of expression and, essentially, to be capable of projecting one's be-

havior in to the future, to choose one's acts and to execute them according to a motive not entirely determined by external necessity or even physiological constraint, but also by the meaning of anticipated goals.

We thus understand that what imparts to work its value for human realization is the delayed aspect of the pursued goal, and the meaning which the quest of this goal gives the activity.

Constraint has no other value than to stimulate to action. If it becomes dominant, it lessens the human value of the work and gives it a deterministic and rather depressing aura.

In studies of man and his behavior the causal importance accorded by students to specifically human and generally vital factors is frequently linked with an optimistic or pessimistic viewpoint, and to an orientation which ranges from a pure metaphysical abstraction to contemplation restricted to directly observable facts.

Is one philosophical position better than another? Whether man be essentially good or bad, governed by reason or a slave to his instincts; whether he be the master of the choice of his activities or bounded by constraints as to living habits and ways of thinking in his environment, these are all viewpoints which are advanced and challenged by many theories, and yet not one can offer a categorical and simple answer to an essentially complex question (Cf. Coleman, 1960).

The temperament of philosophers and researchers, their own experiences in life, the views with which they approached the problem of the nature of man, have been such that one aspect or another is particularly valued, thus resulting, over all, in a projection of the author, his era, and his work.

It would be wrong, however, to want to be too categorical. A classification such as the one proposed by Lowe (1959) of four basic lines of thought: naturalistic, culturalistic, humanistic, and theistic, does not create impermeable barriers between these philosphical positions. Like the counselor, the man of science studying the nature of man attempts to go beyond the a priori of his value system by focussing on what is real, rather than interpreting it for the benefit of a preconceived idea. The availability of whatever is real brings acceptance of different forms or appearances of reality. Different viewpoints concerning the nature of man, all well supported, simply make manifest the complexity of the human being and his diverse possibilities of realization.

One extremely fecund tendency of human sciences today is to arrive at a synthesis of all the data provided by research in the various disciplines, each having its own techniques and particular sphere of application. The grouped contributions from psychology, sociology, and physical and cultural anthropology provide a better grasp of the unique character of human nature independently of race or sex, and, at the same time, of the great diversity of behavioral manifestations, attitudes, and beliefs behind them. What is remarkable is that the distribution of averages characteristic of a trait in different races is always affected by a variance which is less than the distribution of individual scores for this same trait, in one racial group (Cf. Anatasi, 1958).

What is most evident is that everywhere man tries to realize himself according to what he believes, to the best of his intelligence, by reacting, individually, to the general conditions of his environment.

Various theories and particular methods of research have shed some light on numerous aspects of the developmental paths taken by man in his evolution and his biological, psychological, and social growth.

It is advisable that the counselor be able to synthesize and that he become aware that the relativization of the importance and the autonomy of the human being in his life and his universe, if it prevents self-confident fantasy, gives us the tools necessary to understand human nature in all its complexity.

That the earth not be the center of the universe; that man be the product of an evolution in progress; that his behavior depends, to a large extent, on subconscious motives; that the destiny of the masses be governed in its history by economic infrastructures ignored by those who were affected by it; that cultural influences be determinants in ways of behaving and thinking — all these must lead to a realistic perception of global man involved with everything with which he lives and in which he participates, even subconsciously, in realizing his life.

3. MAN AND WORK

REALIZATION OF ONE'S SELF IN WORK, AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES.

Realization of one's self in work is a possibility but not an automatic occurrence.

We have already described work in terms of its components: activity, the delayed reward, and frequent constraint.

Activity is vital; if it does not appear in work, it will necessarily emerge elsewhere. The delayed goal and constraint are two aspects which affect the human value of activity in work.

The delayed goal is always linked with a notion of economy, in the sense of a relationship between effort and productive yield. This yield may be material or moral, with immediate or long-range returns, directly rewarded by the product of labor or indirectly by a participation in overall returns, whether financial or moral. For the great majority of workers, however, salary or unfair treatment has but a remote relationship, in most cases unknown, with the real profit which the industry or the company employing them makes from their work.

The delayed goal of work becomes, at this point, very abstract. It may take the form of moral duty with the satisfaction of a job well done; it may dissolve into an ideal of forgetting one's self and thinking about the company or the country, or an ideological cause.

Needless to say that for the majority of wage-earners, anonymous work is a simple response to a personal economic obligation with the aim of getting the most for the minimum effort, and then to devoting the activity withheld at work to leisure time.

The aspect of constraint in work is then predominant, the delayed goal is made indirect to the value of work which is solely the profit conferred by employment. Man is only a economical instrument.

It is with this level of worker, one with limited personal aspirations, that the manpower counsellor will have to do the most in the employment office. It is to these people that the counsellor must direct his personal attention and respect in order to assist them in selecting employment which will not only provide their daily bread, but also satisfy their tastes, personal talents, and the need to realize themselves in their work, not just through the salary which comes with the job.

For the salaried worker, the honest semi-specialized worker such as the engineer, development at work is closely linked to the satisfaction he obtains in executing a task when his particular skills can be recognized and appreciated.

With reason, the simple placement of men in work, because of a few specific aptitudes has been criticized. These are no less important to consider than that the worker may realize, in his work, the best of himself *at his level* — neither too far below it, which can give rise to dissatisfaction, aggression or leaving — nor too high above it, which can result in anxiety, mistakes, and loss of employment.

But to aptitude and particular skills we must add all the personal factors which influence an individual's adaptation to the particular group in which he exercises his work activity. It would be rash, for example, to think that a given blacksmith, who is an excellent craftsman in his village, but who has been forced to move to the city because of decreasing population in his town, can automatically develop as a metallurgical worker in a large assembly shop. Beyond this craftsman's real competence for working with iron, there is a personality, a value system, and even a way of working, which were formed in an environment with prospects which are totally foreign to the atmosphere of a factory, to anonymous work, accomplished in mass production. He risks being unhappy, disillusioned, and even not wanting to satisfy his employers. His rural culture, his training as a craftsman who attaches greater importance to quality than to speed of production, his habit of being the master of his work and time, all these will militate against him in his new environment.

The cultural environment, whether we wish it or not, instills itself, along with its particularities, into the personality and development of everyone's value system. This must be taken into account when we are concerned with doing more than just "placing a candidate," when we are concerned with helping a person to realize himself at work.

SATISFACTION AT WORK

Often, when a worker finds neither satisfaction nor development, he prefers to limit his *standard* of living, and to arrive at a *type* of life in which he has the feeling of better realizing himself. Rather than do overtime, even if well paid, he prefers to be at home or devote his time to non-remunerative activities which grant him a type of life which is more attuned to his tastes and which he therefore values (Fourastié, 1962).

In fact, satisfaction at work is not as strongly linked with salary as the employer would hope. When one considers particularly hard work, dangerous or unpopular work, salary is certainly determinant. With a high enough

salary, it is possible to push workers to do the most tedious work. It would be naive to hope for great satisfaction in these circumstances.

We know that most orthodox investigations, made with questionnaires or scales for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of factors in work satisfaction for the working class, put security and stability of employment first, and the kind of work needed, then the chances of getting ahead, and interpersonal relationships, and finally the attractions of a high salary. Following salary are factors such as concern for the kind of boss, good working conditions, employee benefits, good working hours, room for initiative at work, and, finally, easy work.

This kind of nomenclature for factors of work satisfaction, which empirically reflects a scale of values as they are perceived by workers at work, is susceptible to many variations according to the kinds of questions asked, the sample of respondents, and the particular occurrences that affect such a group of workers.

We must remark that in a concrete work situation, employees value particularly the factors of dissatisfaction, those that Herzberg calls hygiene or environmental factors, to the detriment of the more fundamental personal factors in work satisfaction. A simple analogy may help in understanding this phenomenon: observe a wild animal, uncertain of finding food and keeping the food for itself. When such an animal catches its prey, its first worry is to keep it for itself. The rapid and anxious glances the animal casts around show the fear it has of losing the meat; it is thus prevented from enjoying the meal, and only satiety pacifies it. It becomes calm only when the food is devoured and can no longer be taken away.

For man, when work becomes submerged into the vital need of assuring subsistence for himself and for his family, or submerged into guaranteeing himelf a socially acceptable status, motivation at work is not different from that which results from the primitive drive of hunger.

All the factors tending to impede the security of employment, or to make its rewards uncertain, take on a vital importance. When security is assured, people will tend to find obligations in work that are necessary before they receive the benefits of less arduous work. In this elementary process, satisfaction is not linked with work in itself, but with the benefits that work bestows, and with the least disagreeable way of getting through the obligatory intermediate stage of working for the purpose of gaining benefits.

To love work for itself, to find in it an overture to a wider reality where one discovers oneself and realizes oneself at the same time that one learns to know and to value work — this is an ideal that brings true satisfaction in work. This ideal, which was easily realizable in handicraft, is actually the property of a privileged class of workers: surely it would be preferable to extend it to all workers and give them the opportunity to be personally involved in a realization of their work.

But as Wrenn (1964) remarks so rightly:

> The nature of employed work in our society has changed, and its power to give satisfaction to the worker has diminished; the sooner we accept this fact, the sooner we can develop a comprehensive set of solutions (p. 35).

For most workers we can, in reality, avoid the most flagrant causes of dissatisfaction in work, and to do so is important. Following this, we can provide opportunities for finding satisfaction in work, however humble, by taking account of preferences, aspirations, and individual capacities so as to give to each person the opportunity of accomplishing well at his level. Then we can be effective through showing ways of bringing about more and more individuality at work, of increasing responsibility, and of creating an opportunity for realizing the part one's work plays in the operation of an enterprise. Workers could be allowed gradual access to more highly regarded tasks of increasingly professional quality.

This system is appropriate for people who wish to realize themselves in their work and to be happy in it. But while trying to find ways to keep a man happy at work, it is very important to realize that work is only one aspect of the reality man strives to know. It is only one way in which he discovers himself as he pursues his goals, for his destiny is his own and is not entirely attainable through work.

In our society work is a real duty which occupies one important part of the active life of each man. Even if the time devoted to work activity becomes restricted, it is still desirable that this activity be growth-enriching. And it will be so insofar as man pursues in his work, as in his other activity, a goal which is his own, which is his vocation. Activity will be growth-enriching insofar as man discovers his being in a faith that engulfs work in the totality of his life. The material things of life are paltry if they are only used to help man to appear greater than he really is. However, he slaves himself if he submits to the dictates of things. One does not truly live *through* things. One lives in harmony with *things* in pursuing one's goal, in following one's vocation.

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