

ON THE NEED FOR WORK AS SUCH

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The human body is not just an add-on to the spirit, the temporary and confining abode of a spirit that wishes to be free. The human body is an integral part of the human person. [Peggy Keilholz, p. 43]

A company is not a casual association, but a group of persons joined in common work or purpose or achievement. The root of “company” refers to persons who share bread -- a powerful ancient symbol of life; companions are persons whose lives intertwine, whose lives depend upon one another. [*Company*].

The need for work as such along with physical need are the two fundamental needs that flow directly from the materiality of human nature. For that reason these two needs, taken together, are referred to as human material need.¹

The embodiment of human beings is crucial both for social economics and for the social economy because without embodiment there would be no human material need and without that need there would be no social economy and therefore no social economics.

By affirming that human beings are embodied, we do not imply that they are thoroughly known or even knowable. To the contrary, we insist that mystery is a critical aspect of the human constitution. Put somewhat differently, one cannot do social economics without addressing human material need under both aspects.

Human materiality has even wider implications than these. Indeed, embodiment is crucial to any authentic economics and to any anthropocentric economic order because, as with death, materiality is an inescapable and undeniable condition of human existence. Because need is a normative concept, it follows that the only authentic economics is normative and that positive economics proceeds only by denying or obscuring or ignoring the materiality of human nature

Not surprisingly, therefore, the *homo economicus* of conventional economics is represented not as a living, breathing, existential actuality that is unique and whole but as an abstract agent that is directed entirely by reason and motivated completely by self-interest. This metaphysics is absolutely essential because it is only through disembodiment that conventional economics can maintain the pretense of a positive science and through desocialization that it can assert that individualism is sufficient to make a market economy efficient, orderly, and tranquil. Otherwise, conventional economics is exposed as a house of cards not for the reason that *homo economicus* is represented as acting from pure reason and self-interest but because disembodiment means that *homo economicus* is pure reason and desocialization means that self-interest is the common good.

¹ See my "Poverty: A Concept That Is Both Absolute and Relative Because Human Beings Are At Once Individual and Social" in *Review of Social Economy* (forthcoming) for a discussion of the physical-need side of human material need.

Mainstream economics affirms itself as addressing economic affairs as they are instead of as they ought to be. Oddly, and fatally for conventional economics, this is done by representing human beings not as they actually are but as abstractions in order to raise economics to the status of positive science. Instead of tailoring the clothes to fit the human, conventional economics alters the human to fit the clothes.

Stripping human beings of their materiality in the academic order is powerfully related to rendering them into objects in the economic order in that both disembodiment and depersonalization have a profound disregard for the essence of human nature. The first dismisses materiality and material need. The second casts aside intelligence and free will and therefore the rightful place of humans in the economic order as the authentic end of all economic activity.

Objectification signifies that human beings are mere means that are undifferentiated from nonhuman economic resources and may be subordinated to any human beings with the power and the will to do so. Depersonalization states in effect that some humans are created dominant, the rest are subordinate. Deprived of materiality, human beings become abstractions. Deprived of intelligence and free will, they are reduced to objects. An economics and economy that diminish humans thusly command one's respect only if we are persuaded that human beings do not matter much.

This essay proceeds from three main premises. First, human being is not an object but a person and for that reason matters much. This person functioning in the economic order at first was called *homo socio-economicus*. Second, work is organized and performed through two main modes or channels conforming to the duality of human nature. We refer to those modes or channels as individual contribution and teamwork. Third, work has two main effects on persons conforming also to the duality of human nature. We refer to those effects as individual development. We prefer this term to the conventional "human capital" which to us suggests a certain objectification of the person because of the identification of capital with things and belonging.

In the section immediately following, we discuss individual contribution and creativity. The former is the mode for organizing work, while the latter is the effect of work, both of which reflect the individual side of the person. Later we discuss teamwork and belonging. The one is the channel for organizing work and the other is the effect of work that reflect the social side of the person. In both sections, we demonstrate that the need for work as such is twofold corresponding once again to the duality of human nature.

In what follows, person and work are presented in the context of the secular world. No attempt is made to introduce the sacred as is done, for instance, by John Paul II in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* where work is affirmed as sharing in the activity of the Creator [Section V]. In other words, the need for work as such which we address in these pages is purely secular.

CREATIVITY: MEETING THE INDIVIDUAL NEED FOR WORK THROUGH INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION

By the duality of human nature we mean that human nature has two sides: the individual and the social. A human being is an individual being, that is one-of-a-kind, independent, self determining, with a free will that follows the intellect. Fingerprints and signature are evidence that each one of us is an individual being.

In principle, human beings are not diminished as individuals for being at once social and are no less social for being individual. In practice, however, specific human beings may express one side of their nature so vigorously as to diminish the other side. The stubborn individualist carries his/her individuality to the point where it may be damaging to the good of the group or the team. The "yes man" or "company man" may become so submerged in the group as to severely cripple his individuality. Thus, a central task in preserving one's personhood is the careful balancing of one's individuality and socialibility.

For our purposes herein, work is defined as any activity that produces a good or service of some utility or beauty whether the work is paid or unpaid and whether it is done for hire or not. Included under this broad definition are paid employment, unpaid employment in a family business, home production, voluntarism, and leisure activities. This departure from the conventional practice of differentiating leisure from labor is justified on grounds that human beings commonly engage in all of the activities enumerated above as ways of meeting the need for work as such.

Creativity.

Work affords a person as an individual an opportunity to *produce something* of utility or beauty by contributing skills and talents that *are uniquely* his/hers. The process of hiring, for example, is an activity that by definition is performed individual by individual on the basis of each one's suitability for the work to be done and the labor contract, whether formal or not, represents a commitment made by a person as an individual to contribute in some individual way to the production of some good(s) or service(s).

Production is organized to incorporate the contributions of workers as individuals not primarily because work has been organized for the benefit of the individual workers but mainly due to the fact that every human being has a *special* endowment of skills and talents and typically a wide variety of individual skills and talents are required in the process of production. Skills and talents differentiate one person from another and for that reason reinforce one's individuality.

The act of hiring is an individual act in which a person is evaluated and judged to be capable of making a contribution as an individual. Notice, in this regard, every job has its own (though not unique) title and work space. It is not just a figure of speech to call it "my desk", "my bench", or "my machine". Notice too that compensation is tied to individual contribution and is paid to persons as individuals.

The act of terminating too is an individual act even though it sometimes is done in groups, such as through a reduction in force. Even then, however, it is individuals who are terminated. To an important extent (plant closure being one exception), the group involved in any termination is

simply a set of individuals who have been designated for termination, most often by in terms of years of service, and is not a team.

Under those circumstances, the group is a figure of speech because the individuals involved are not necessarily related to one another as real teammates or close to one another. This is especially so when termination is administered according to the rule "last hired, first fired". In these situations, it is the terminated individuals who truly are and who truly bear any burdens that are associated with the action.

A major task for the person who holds a supervisory position is to draw from the individual all that he/she is able to contribute to the process of production. Human beings are unique economic resources in that human beings alone among resources have the free will to withhold some of their productive energies. The act of withholding some of the energy that one might contribute to the process of production is further evidence as to the individuality of the person.

Individual contribution means that the need for work is individual in part because short of slavery the only skills and talents that a person can contribute as resources to the process of production are his/her own. In some cases the good or service produced bears the visible imprint or signature of the individual contributor. In telegraphy, to illustrate, each operator leaves a distinguishing signature on his/her transmission even though the operator is not alone in making the transmission actually happen. In other cases, the contribution of any one individual may be completely submerged in the contributions of many other individuals and becomes visible only when that individual's work is substandard and the user or consumer is strapped with a product or service that is defective or deficient.

Every good or service produced reflects the contributions made by each one of the individuals involved. Thus contribution means that in the process of production the whole is equal to the sum of the individual parts.

In the section on socialibility and the need for work we argue that the whole is not just the sum of the parts. By affirming individual contribution as one of the two main channels for organizing and performing work, we insist that individuals make a difference even when that difference is not readily observable.

Individual Development.

Human beings have a need for work that is individualized because if work effort is entirely socialized or homogenized (i.e., work is organized as if everyone who works is perfectly interchangeable) the individual may become so subordinated that he/she becomes in effect more object than person. Thus, personhood and the dignity that attaches to personhood rest on the contribution of the individual to work (broadly defined).

We are not saying that one must work in order to be a person. Our argument is, instead, if a person works the work must be individualized because otherwise that person may be reduced to a mere instrument in the workplace and thereby would be deprived of full personhood. Further, whether deprived of the opportunity to work or deprived of work that utilizes his/her endowment, the person forgoes some individual development and becomes less than all that

he/she can be. The need for work as such derives in part from the developmental need of the person as a unique, independent, and self-determining being and reflects an interest in one's individual being (self-interest) that is necessary to that person's survival.

The very endowments of skills and talents that differ from one individual to another and that make possible the production of a wide variety of goods and services mean that the need for work that is to be fulfilled through individual contribution is not the same from one person to the next. Given continuous change in a market economy (demand) and much individual freedom in preparing for work and in choosing where and for whom to work (supply), the individual need for work as such must be addressed through methods that are continuously changing and that may fall short of fully accommodating that aspect of the need for work.

In an imperfect world, the task of meeting the individual need for work therefore is ever challenging and stressful. In general, the longer the individual need remains unmet, the more difficult it becomes to address it successfully because idle skills and talents tend to deteriorate with the passage of time. There is, however, a positive side to all of this. Human beings are unique resources not only in that human beings alone can withhold some of their productive energies but also in that human beings alone can have their endowments enhanced through their use as instruments of work. For all other resources, use signifies depletion.

Thus, the relationship between work and individual development is not linear with work as cause and individual development as effect. Rather, it is circular with both so intertwined that each one at once is both cause and effect. Further, it is self-interest -- a proper concern for one's own well-being -- that prompts the individual contribution. In a market economy where individual income depends importantly on the economic significance of one's contribution, self-interest is essential to survival.

BELONGING: MEETING THE SOCIAL NEED FOR WORK THROUGH TEAMWORK

Every human being has a social side to his/her nature as well as an individual side. By socialibility we mean that human beings are alike, are dependent on one another, and are conditioned by their environment. Just as our fingerprints and signature identify us as individual beings, the faculty of speech and human sexuality establish us as social beings. As mentioned previously, this duality along with embodiment is at the very core of personhood.

Teamwork.

Work affords a person an opportunity to produce something of utility or beauty not only by contributing skills and talents that are uniquely his/hers but also by participating and interacting with others on a common task. Two persons working alongside one another is not teamwork unless there is some reason for the two to communicate as to how the work is to be done. In this regard, notice the difference between conventional teaching and team teaching.

Teamwork is the intertwined individual contributions of two or more persons toward the production of a good or service such that it is not possible to clearly and completely differentiate one contribution from another and to divide all of the responsibility for the final

results among the various individuals involved. Thus, teamwork introduces another duality: responsibility that is both individual and collective.

Teamwork is organized by enlarging human motivation from individual goals pursued competitively to include common goals pursued cooperatively. To be successful, teamwork requires a blending of self-interest and a genuine concern for others.

Three years ago the author site-visited Bollinger Machine Shop and Shipyard, a family-owned and operated shipyard in south Louisiana which employs about 250 workers. Before the decline in oil prices and U.S. oil production in the early 1980s Bollinger produced one-of-a-kind customized "boat trucks" for use in servicing off-shore oil rigs. To survive after the decline in the U.S. oil industry, Bollinger bid on and won a U.S. Coast Guard contract to manufacture several identical, high-speed boats for use in interdicting illegal drug shipments.

The work was organized around two identical, side-by-side production lines which competed with each other to see which one could deliver a finished vessel first. Each boat was built in 550 steps which were grouped into sets of related tasks and assigned to various teams in the production line. To instill cooperation up and down the line, any team that was idle because the team immediately up the line had not finished its assignment on time was sent home without pay. This harsh financial incentive for cooperation worked because of the large labor surpluses in "the oil patch". This blending is achieved (if at all) with some difficulty.

Cooperation helps organize the workplace by socializing the individual so that others at work on the same task are viewed as partners. Competition organizes the workplace by paying the largest rewards to the workers with the best performance records. Others, therefore, are viewed as rivals. The blending is difficult precisely because every member of the team must strike a personal balance in the perception of others on the team as partners and as rivals such that the whole may become greater than the sum of the parts. Any failure in this regard means that the whole may become less than the sum of the parts.

Teamwork, for sure, enhances individual development by enhancing one's endowment (mainly through one-on-one and group on-the-job training). It cannot be otherwise because in the first instance teamwork depends on individuals contributing their individual skills and talents and, as we stated previously, the very utilization of the endowment makes it self-reproducing.

Teams may be small and simple or large and complex. Two tradesmen carrying a length of pipe on a construction project and two truckers driving their 18-wheelers in tandem are examples of the first type. A large group of senior managers and technical specialists working on a start-up project such as a new manufacturing facility and a surgical team undertaking a heart-lung transplant are examples of the second type.

Whether large or small, complex or simple, all teams have one thing in common: necessity or efficiency. That is, a team may be necessary in the sense that there is no other way to accomplish the task at hand or a team may outperform sets of independent individuals on the same task. Additionally, teams may be permanent or ad-hoc, entrepreneurial or managerial,

completely contained within a single operating unit or encompass several units in line or in parallel, single-skilled or multi-skilled, self-managed or hierarchically run.

The difficulty in separating individual contribution from team effort argues for a dual system of rewards to separately recognize both. In a real sense, such a system reflects and reinforces the duality in human nature: one part individual being, the other part social being. For purposes of organizing and administering the workplace, the dual-rewards system presents the same delicate assignment of balancing between the perception of others in the workplace as rivals and the perception of them as partners. That is, a weighing of competition and cooperation as foundational organizing principles.

There are numerous options available to the company that seeks to reward its workers on the basis of collective effort as well as individual contribution. Gain-sharing is one method that has won some favor in the United States although it would be an exaggeration to describe its utilization as wide-spread. At General Electric's transformer plant in Shreveport, Louisiana hourly workers receive their regular weekly pay on Friday. In addition, every Wednesday these workers receive their gain-sharing pay which is based importantly on plant-wide savings in labor time on defect-free units of production.²

For many firms with gain-sharing plans, the financial reward is relatively small alongside the worker's regular earnings. For a few, such as Lincoln Electric which is a Cleveland manufacturer of small electric motors and welding equipment, gain-sharing actually doubles the base-pay of the typical worker [Baldwin].

Cash bonuses tied to achieving pre-determined goals or milestones is another way or recognizing collective effort. In-kind bonuses is a third. Stone Container Corporation, for example, in 1988 gave a color television set to each one of its 22,000 employees for "helping make Stone an industry leader" [*Bayou Craftsman*, p. 10]. This year, Stone gave each employee a VCR.

At Stone's paper mill located in Hodge, Louisiana the motto is "At Hodge, the difference is teamwork". A site-visit by the author last year confirmed that the motto is more than mere public-relations puffery.

In-kind bonuses may be linked to specific performance goals. At Atlas Refining in Shreveport the program provides a variety of items that individual workers may select as a bonus for achieving certain pre-determined safety goals. An unusual feature of the program at Atlas is that the goals are defined in terms of the team, not the individual. The program was established to reinforce the importance of team members carefully observing the actions of others on the team particularly in situations which are hazardous. The payoff to an oil refinery from a successful safety program is self-evident.³

² From information supplied by General Electric senior management at the Shreveport facility during a quality-and productivity-improvement site visit by the author and one other person in 1984

A collective "pat-on-the-back" is another form of reward for team performance. This method is used by Martin Marietta in New Orleans where problem-solving work groups are called system refinement teams (SRT). This facility produces the external fuel tank for the space shuttle and SRTs were established to help promote zero-defect production. Every month one SRT is identified and honored for its performance. At the end of the year, the best SRT is selected and sent as a team at company expense to witness a shuttle launch.⁴

On occasion, the reward for teamwork is rudimentary: the employees get to keep their jobs. That is, sometimes reorganizing the workplace around teamwork is a last-ditch effort by the senior management to protect the financial viability of the enterprise. In 1988, the author and others site-visited an AT&T manufacturing facility in Shreveport which was physically and administratively reorganized into large teams called "focused factories" in order to protect several thousand jobs from the stiff competition that followed divestiture at AT&T in the early 1980s. Some might be inclined to dismiss this reward with a certain cynicism about the company's true motives. The author's strong impression is that the reorganization actually saved about 3,000 jobs that otherwise probably would have been lost and that the employees there had a strong perception of one another as partners in the workplace.

Belonging.

Just as individual development is the fruit of individual contribution, belonging proceeds out of teamwork. Belonging is the sense that one is an important member of the team in terms of its ability to accomplish its mission. Dempsey expresses belonging in the language of the typical worker: "... any day I'm missing they scramble around to get my spot covered" [p. 254].

Work has two central actions: thinking and doing. When a person works completely alone and isolated from all other human beings, these two actions by definition are joined. When a person works in the company of others, these two actions may become separated. Indeed, it is not at all unusual in a modern industrial society to assign the thinking to one set of persons (management) and the doing to another (labor) and, furthermore, to identify thinking as a prerogative of management. Heron argues that worker cooperation depends most fundamentally on providing them with opportunities to share in the thinking [p. 172].

People cannot be joined into a team if the two central actions of work divide them. Given that thought precedes action and determines it, the doers inevitably will be regarded as less important than and therefore subordinate to the thinkers. Teamwork becomes much more difficult in a work environment where the parties involved are divided into two unequal groups.

We conclude that teamwork depends on management's valuing workers sufficiently to ask them to contribute their insights as to how the work is to be done and that belonging is the fruit of

³ From information provided by Atlas Refining officials during a quality- and productivity-improvement site visit by the author and others in 1986.

⁴ From information provided by officials at the Martin Marietta facility in New Orleans during a site visit by the author and others in 1985.

such valuing. In brief, belonging proceeds from teamwork and teamwork proceeds from caring. A person belongs when others care enough to ask him/her to think as well as to do.

In a 1984 site visit to the General Electric plant in Shreveport, the author and a second visitor asked a security guard in the reception area what it was like to work there. The guard explained that she did not work there because she was employed by a security service under contract to GE but that she wished that she worked for GE because "they care about their workers". This plant was the first recipient of the U.S. Senate Productivity Award, State of Louisiana, for its gain-sharing program. Further, caring is possible only when human beings are seen mainly as persons with material needs and not as objects or even as human resources.

Tischner explains the connection between teamwork (which he calls "solidarity") and caring as follows:

... Conscience is the foundation of solidarity, and the stimulus for its development is the cry for help from someone wounded by another human being. Solidarity establishes specific, interpersonal bonds; one person joins with another to tend to one who needs care. I am with you, you are with me, we are together - for him. We - for him. We, not to look at each other, but for him. Which comes first here? Is "we" first, or is "for him" first? The communion of solidarity differs from many other communions in that "for him" is first and "we" comes later. First is the wounded one and the cry of pain. Later, conscience speaks, since it is able to hear and understand this cry. This is all it takes for communion to spring up [p. 9].

Belonging is significant because there really is strength in numbers. Belonging means being more secure than one would be if one were entirely alone. Families for sure provide security, but given the centrality of labor income and that families do not control the workplace as they did prior to the industrial revolution, families cannot provide adequate security in the modern age. Teams may become workplace families that provide some assurance that the individual members are not alone in meeting their own physical needs in a market economy and the needs of their dependents. Notice in this regard that some business establishments even call themselves "family".

Our argument reduces to the following: Belonging proceeds from teamwork and enhances it and teamwork, in turn, proceeds from caring because caring is essential to survival in a market economy. Man needs to belong in order to survive because, notwithstanding conventional economics, he cannot meet his material need on individuality alone.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Figure 1 summarizes our comments on individual contribution and development, on teamwork and belonging. This summary representation of the arguments presented in this essay may lead

FIGURE 1. PERSON AND HUMAN MATERIAL NEED

THE NEED FOR WORK AS SUCH: PERSON AS WORKER

PHYSICAL NEED: PERSON AS CONSUMER

Individual Being

work that is performed
by means of individual
contribution helps

Social Being

work that is performed
by means of teamwork
helps meet the

Individual Being

Social Being

See my "Poverty: A Concept That Is Both Absolute and Relative Because Human Beings Are At Once Individual and Social," Review of Social Economy, Spring 1990, for a discussion of the physical-need dimension of human need

motivation and primary outcome

meet the need to
develop as an
individual

individual
development
proceeds from
and enhances
individual
contribution

which proceeds from
self-interest

need to belong
to a viable
group

belonging
proceeds from
and enhances
teamwork
which proceeds
from

caring for
others

mutual causality and secondary outcome

which is necessary
for survival in
a market economy

which is necessary
for survival in
a market economy

one to the unfortunate conclusion that analytically differentiating between individual being and social being means that person is two rather than one.

Person is one, not two, because the individual being and the social being that are the constituent parts are so intertwined that it is virtually impossible to separate them. The employer does not hire the social being or the individual being but the whole person who is at once one-of-a-kind and alike, independent and dependent, self-determining and conditioned by the environment. Mysteriously, the person also is fully individual and fully social. Further, the whole person is a material being with two principal needs: physical need and the need for work as such.

For the employer and the workplace this means that it is virtually impossible to foresee precisely what the person will become as the mystery of that person unfolds in part through work. The real challenge in the workplace is to provide opportunities that will allow the person to become all that he/she can be because maximizing those productive energies -- which also are uniquely self-reproductive -- is at the very center of productivity and, as we all know, productivity is critical to meeting physical need.

For the economist and economics this means that our work begins and ends with the person. The personalist foundation means that economics most fundamentally is the study of the person from two special perspectives: worker and consumer. It is as worker that the need for work as such is represented and met and it is as consumer that physical need is articulated and fulfilled. And it is the centrality of human material need to economics that makes it a moral science.

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