

# Work in a Human Economy

Business and Common Good in a Changing Society

A cura di  
Antonio Argandoña Rámiz e Francisco Javier Insa Gómez







PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SANTA CROCE

# WORK IN A HUMAN ECONOMY

Business and Common Good  
in a Changing Society

Atti del Convegno "*The Heart of Work*"  
Pontificia Università della Santa Croce  
Roma, 19-20 ottobre 2017

Volume IV/5

a cura di  
Antonio Argandoña Rámiz  
e  
Francisco Javier Insa Gómez

EDUSC

*Prima edizione 2018*

Atti del Convegno “The Heart of Work” – “Quale anima per il lavoro professionale”, vol. IV

*Comitato Scientifico*

Javier López Díaz (Facoltà di Teologia, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce)

Martin Schlag (Facoltà di Teologia, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce e Direttore del centro di ricerca MCE. Professore all'University of St. Thomas, Minnesota)

Maria Aparecida Ferrari (Facoltà di Filosofia, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce)

Giorgio Faro (Facoltà di Filosofia, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce)

Federico M. Requena (Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá)

*In copertina:*

*Impaginazione*

Gianluca Pignalberi (in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub>)

© Copyright 2018 – ESC s.r.l.

Via Sabotino, 2/A – 00195 Roma

Tel. (39) 06 45493637

info@edusc.it

www.edizionisantacroce.it

ISBN 978-88-8333-773-4

# BRIEF CONTENTS

ANTONIO ARGANDOÑA, FRANCISCO JAVIER INSA <i>Work in a Human Economy: Foreword</i> .....	7
 <b>I. WORK, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE</b>	
GENNARO LUISE <i>Human Work and Economy. A Metaphysical Perspective</i> .....	25
JIVI C. DACANAY <i>Beyond Rational Choice and Needs Gratification: Philosophical-Anthropological Perspectives of Happiness Economics as Human Flourishing</i> .....	39
RONALD R. ROJAS <i>Vocation as Calling and Resilience in the Workplace: A Correlational Study</i> .....	59
MARTIN FERRO <i>Value of Work and Work Motivation on the Basis of Age, Generation, Marital Status and Confession</i> .....	77
DOMÈNEC MELÉ <i>Meanings of Work in Catholic Social Teaching —Dialogue with “Meaningful Work” in Organizational Studies</i> .....	95
MEGAN ARAGO <i>Rights or Wrongs? The Principle of Subsidiarity in Catholic Social Thought, John A. Ryan, and Richard T. Ely</i> .....	115

BRIEF CONTENTS

II. ECONOMY, BUSINESS AND COMMON GOOD

LORD GRIFFITHS OF FFORESTFACH

*Ethical Challenges in the Work Place* ..... 141

ANTONIO ARGANDOÑA

*Work in the Firm: Collective Action and Common Good* ..... 163

CRISTINA QUARANTA, EMILIANO DI CARLO

*Il bene comune come modello mentale per la responsabilità sociale  
d'impresa?* ..... 181

CIRO DE ANGELIS

*La dignità umana tra lavoro, ambiente e salute alla luce della Costituzione  
Italiana e della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa. Riflessioni sul caso Ilva a  
Taranto* ..... 205

III. TECHNOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES OF WORK

MARTIN SCHLAG

*Business and Work: The Future of Work and the Dignity of the Worker* 223

MICHAEL PACANOWSKY

*The Changing Nature of Work in the Creative Age* ..... 235

VALERIA FRATOCCHI INVERNIZZI

*The Future of Work and Workers* ..... 251

# WORK IN A HUMAN ECONOMY: FOREWORD

*Antonio Argandoña, Francisco Javier Insa\**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It should not surprise anyone that a series of books that compile the papers presented at an interdisciplinary international conference on *The Heart of Work. The Future of Work and its Meaning: New Christian Perspectives 500 Years after the Reformation* should include a volume devoted specifically to the economic approach to work, the firm and the economy.

This Chapter is an introduction to that volume. As well as presenting the papers that have been included in it, it also offers a broad view of some of the issues that have been intensely studied by economists and management experts in recent years, in a more or less evident dialogue with Christian social thought. Drawing from the news published by the communication media and the comments made by the experts, it attempts to give account of some of the issues that are currently the subject of discussion in the field of human work: complex, often contradictory issues for which a satisfactory resolution has not yet been found.

Obviously, it is not our purpose here to try to explain the causes of these problems or to offer solutions; that task has been undertaken, in one way or another, by the authors of the different chapters. We will first present the need for more human approaches to economic activity, as

---

\* Antonio Argandoña: Emeritus Professor of Economics and of Business Ethics, and CaixaBank Chair of Corporate Social Responsibility, IESE Business School, University of Navarra.

Francisco Javier Insa: Adjunct Professor of Moral Theology, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce (Rome).



it is the framework within which human work is performed (although it is not the only one, as it does not include such important activities as housework).<sup>1</sup> We will then turn to the more clearly economic side of human work, with a discussion of motivations. This will be followed by an overview of some of the paradoxes and problems of work in the 21st century. The final part of this introduction will be given over to briefly outlining the contents and approaches of the book's other chapters.

## 2. FOR A HUMAN ECONOMY

The reflection on economics as a science and practice, and especially business management, has paid particular attention to the first serious financial crisis of the 21st century, whose effects are still being felt in many countries. Although this Chapter does not aim to be a study of the crisis, we will dwell a little on it, because it has left an imprint on many of the theoretical developments and policy proposals that provide the setting in which human work problems are currently being defined and resolved.

Even now, a decade after the crisis began, the experts continue to discuss its immediate and more remote causes. The former include the excessively expansionary monetary policies implemented by central banks; overborrowing by companies, households and financial institutions; fiscal imbalances in some countries and growth of their sovereign debt to levels that became unsustainable in some cases; the ineffectiveness of regulatory, supervisory and financial control mechanisms; errors in the design of certain projects, such as the European Economic and Monetary Union, which were compounded by further errors in the search for solutions to the crisis and their application. . . In short, these are technical problems which were not foreseen and for which suitable solutions were not sought while there was still time.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. A.F. BRODEUR, *A brief history of housework, 1900 to present*, Home Renaissance Foundation, Working Paper No 41 (2012); A.M. GONZÁLEZ, C. IFFLAND (eds.), *Care Professions and Globalization. Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York (NY) 2014.

<sup>2</sup> On these subjects, see A. ARGANDOÑA, *Three ethical dimensions of the financial crisis*: AA.Vv. (A.G. MALLIARIS, L. SHAW, H. SHEFRIN, eds.), *The Global Financial Crisis and Its*

The crisis also had political and social dimensions: loss of confidence in the economic model and the regulatory bodies' management, social conflicts, political crises that have affected the conception itself of democracy. . . And also ethical dimensions. On an individual level, there was greed, arrogance, lack of temperance, envy. . . While it is true that these vices have been present throughout human history, there are periods when they have become more widespread and deeper rooted, perhaps because of a lack of moral judgement, or because of the power wielded by the incentives (the possibility of making a lot of money in a very short time), or because certain sectors of society became platforms for advocating immoral conducts (with arguments such as "greed is good").

The ethical crisis was also present within the organizations: decline in professional standards, rash risk management, short-term vision, herd-like behaviour, injustices that were ignored (or accepted as an inevitable part of the financial "rules of play"), obliteration of the sense of responsibility, lack of transparency. . .

And, lastly, the ethical crisis also manifested on the macroeconomic level: poor grasp of the general picture of the economic system, predominance of short-term political decisions, abuse of controlling positions, abandonment of the idea of common good in governments' decisions. . . And all these problems were projected onto society in the form of high unemployment, growing inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, lost opportunities for vulnerable people, particularly those on low incomes, social unrest, loss of confidence, search for populist and utopian solutions. . .

So the crisis was not due solely to technical causes and, therefore, could not be corrected with purely technical remedies. When such remedies were applied, the consequences were a disregard for ethics or, worse still, the use of politics and law as sources for creating ethical criteria: in other words, instead of providing solutions, they ended up making the problems even worse.<sup>3</sup>

---

*Aftermath: Hidden Factors in the Meltdown*, Oxford University Press, New York (NY) 2016, 413-428.

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo Polo points out that applying purely technical solutions to human problems gives rise to four types of unforeseen consequences: segmentation (due to a

Ultimately, the causes of the crisis must be sought in the anthropological models of Modernity, which view human beings as abstract agents endowed with a purely instrumental rationality, whose preferences are lacking in any moral dimension, who exclude value judgements as irrelevant, who convert human relations into short-term, impersonal transactions or relations between things, with an understanding of society as a group of individuals without any common goods to share, and who interact for immediate utility reasons. As a result, firms end up becoming abstract communities consisting of impersonal contracts that only pursue economic efficiency, i.e., maximize profit, and decoupled from their human and natural environment. In a word, dehumanized.

This vision of the economic sphere is perhaps a little exaggerated. There are many firms who see themselves as communities of people whose purpose is to serve society and its members, governed by principles of justice and solidarity.<sup>4</sup> However, as the crisis showed, there are many other organizations in which the economic dimension dominates, where impersonal capitals end up taking control of decisions, and people become relegated to the function of resource. It is true that academics are making efforts to incorporate ethics and social responsibility in organizations, to propose truly human relations, to help managers understand that the person must be at the heart of the firm, and that good management is that which attains economic, social, environmental and ethical goals. But a lot of work still needs to be done before there can be any change in the meaning given to human relations within the firm and with its environment.<sup>5</sup>

The chapters included in this volume address such a change in the theoretical and practical framework of the firm, which includes a

---

narrow view of problems), the emergence of perverse effects in other areas (because it is impossible to guarantee consistency if projects are not coordinated), anomy (the despondency of those who do not find any guides for action, only extrinsic stimuli) and social entropy (when institutions lose their function). And all these effects are seen in people's work. Cfr. L. POLO, *Sobre la existencia cristiana*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. D. MELÉ, *The firm as a 'community of persons': A pillar of humanistic business ethos*, «Journal of Business Ethics» 106 (2012) 89-101.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. E. VON KIMAKOVITZ, M. PIRSON, H. SPITZECK, C. DIRKSMEIER, W. AMANN, *Humanistic Management in Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2011.

reflection on the concept of work itself, given its role as a key production factor, even in the most economistic conceptions of the firm.

### 3. THE MOTIVATIONS FOR WORK

Why do we work? Work is an action of the person, and the person acts because he has needs. These needs must be understood in a very broad sense: we need food, clothing and shelter; we need to be satisfied with what we do and how we are treated by others; we need to learn, develop skills, feel that we are in control of our acts, help others, give glory to God. . .

When people act, they do so because they hope to obtain a result. These results can be classified in three categories:<sup>6</sup>

1. Extrinsic results, which come to the agent from outside; they may be material, such as salary or career opportunities, or intangible, such as social recognition or professional standing.
2. Intrinsic results, which take place within the agent: for example, satisfaction or dissatisfaction provided by the task performed, knowledge acquisition, skill development or growing in virtues.
3. Transcendent or pro-social results, which are those produced in other people: satisfying family needs, serving the customer, helping a colleague or an awareness of fulfilling God's will.

The existence of three types of result gives rise to three types of motivation in the worker: extrinsic, intrinsic and transcendent or pro-social. We often pursue several motivations simultaneously in our actions, although there is usually one that predominates, the intention, which is what determines, among other factors, the action's ethical quality. These motivations provide a good guide for understanding the action performed by the person who works.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. J.A. PÉREZ LÓPEZ, *Fundamentos de la dirección de empresas*, Rialp, Madrid 1993; A. ARGANDOÑA, *Integrating ethics into action theory and organizational theory*, «Journal of Business Ethics» 78 (2008) 435-446; IDEM, *Consistency in decision making in companies*, IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Working Paper No 1128 (2015).

Extrinsic motivation—for example, working to make a living—is a legitimate motivation. Remuneration of work is the outcome of contributing to the production of goods and services that satisfy other people’s needs. The wish to earn more may be one way of covering the worker’s material needs and those of his family, improving his standard of living and helping others. The utilitarian motivation for work is clear and, almost always, legitimate. It forms part of the logic of the contract, of the exchange between equals, giving to receive, although it does not exclude other more generous forms of giving. But, as we will see further on, the economic dimension of work is also the cause of problems, from inadequacy of income at one extreme to greed and the inordinate pursuit of wealth at the other extreme, to the detriment of other necessary aspects, or envy elicited by comparison between one’s own possessions and those of one’s peers.

When the agent acts out of intrinsic motivation, his goal is to obtain certain results that he himself generates through his work: satisfaction, acquire skills, attitudes and virtues, and develop his identity as a worker, which is an important part of his identity as a person. Work as a means for self-realization is a legitimate motivation: it is a form of love for oneself, although it can also give rise to egotistic, narcissistic or presumptuous conducts.

Transcendent or pro-social motivation comes into play when the agent understands that he is taking part in a collective task and takes other people’s needs into account: customers, colleagues, associates, and also people he does not know personally or does not know they exist. This is usually the sphere of the logic of gift, although it does not exclude a certain degree of reciprocity: giving so that the other person is also motivated to give. Work is a form of relating with others, which is sometimes direct and immediate, and at other times indirect and distant, such as the person who works alone but is aware that he is contributing to a chain of services that starts before him and will continue after him in space and time. However, this social dimension may break down, for example, due to a lack of sense of community at the workplace, because the work is done within individualistic organization systems, because the organization’s rules lead to fractured loyalties at work, or because the environment fosters competition instead of cooperation.

As a last point, we would highlight that transcendent motivations also leave an imprint on the agent himself: the acquisition of social virtues, and in this respect, they are related with intrinsic motivations. For example, the employee who tries to act in accordance with his customer's needs is performing an act of love, in that he is seeking another person's good. He is acquiring a stable habit, a virtue.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. THE PARADOX OF WORK AND THE PROBLEMS OF WORK

In our societies, particularly in the more advanced societies, work is highly valued:<sup>8</sup> as a source of income, it offers the possibility of satisfying human needs, it releases us from many natural constraints and enables us to control our environment to a much higher degree than animals. It is also a basic element in building social life. Today's advanced societies pride themselves on offering everyone, at least in theory, a decent job that is adequately remunerated and offers prospects of individual advancement and self-realization.

However, work can also be dehumanizing. The lack of security in many jobs, governed by temporary contracts, with an uncertain duration and badly paid, is associated with significant psychological, social and economic costs. Lack of work causes deep personal and social distress, creates serious difficulties for the person to maintain himself and his family, destroys hopes and possibilities of improvement, and often leads the person to withdraw into himself and lose sight of the meaning of existence.

---

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. A. ARGANDOÑA, *Las virtudes en una teoría de la acción humana*: AA.VV. (P. REQUENA, M. SCHLAG, eds.), *La persona al centro del Magistero sociale della Chiesa*, Edusc, Roma 2011, 49-71; A. ARGANDOÑA, *Beyond contracts: Love in firms*, «Journal of Business Ethics» 99 (2011) 77-85; IDEM, *Humility in management*, «Journal of Business Ethics» 132 (2015) 63-71; IDEM, *Humility and decision making in companies*, IESE Business School, University of Navarra, *Working Paper* No 1164 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> There is an abundant literature on the paradox of work. See, for example, U. BECK, *The Brave New World of Work*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2000; J. BIBERMAN, M. WHITTY, *A postmodern spiritual framework*, «Journal of Organizational Change Management» 10 (1997) 130-138; F. GREEN, *Demanding Work: The Paradox of Job Quality in the Affluent Economy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2006.

Having a job is very important for anyone, but that job may be subject to degrading conditions: mechanical, repetitive, exhausting tasks that are meaningless or unappreciated; tasks in which it is not possible to show and develop one's abilities, with no attainable challenges that encourage one to transcend limits; tasks in which there is no room for personal decision power, or which force the person to engage in immoral conducts. Work is often viewed as an abstract good, a purely instrumental (and therefore alienating) activity, a production factor that can be replaced by other workers or even by machines. The worker's activity is valued for what it produces, not for what it is.

These paradoxes of work show the ambivalence of Modernity, which swings between the glorification of humanity and optimism in the face of progress, on one hand, and the vilification of the individual and pessimism about his future, on the other hand. Technology is one of the manifestations of that paradox: it is portrayed as having the power to liberate mankind, taking his place in the performance of gruelling, repetitive and inhuman tasks, but also as the enemy of the worker, whose job is replaced by a machine, and not just in tiring and tedious manual activities but also in skilled tasks.

In our societies, work also suffers from other problems for which there is no easy solution. One of them, perhaps the most important one, is its absence: unemployment, which implies denial of a means of subsistence, of the meaning of work and even of life itself. With unemployment, the individual is unable to put into practice his knowledge and skills and faces difficulties in acquiring new ones; he is denied a part of his identity which, in modern societies, is associated with one's profession, and he must bear a social stigma that leads to isolation of the unemployed person and the loss of social relations. Unemployment is perceived as a great social injustice, as it is assumed that there exists an implicit social contract in which the community offers individuals the means to satisfy their needs, improve their condition and participate in the fruits of progress, in exchange for the time devoted to work; with the lack of work, all this is taken away and the person is condemned to a state of destitution.

Admittedly, in many countries, being unemployed is not synonymous with financial deprivation, thanks to a more or less generous

social security system: retirement pension, unemployment insurance, subsidized health care, minimum income, financial assistance for dependency in later life, etc. However, the availability of economic resources is no replacement for human and social self-realization through work. In addition, insecurity, low wages and unemployment jeopardize the sustainability of the welfare state. Welfare benefits are funded from the income generated by the worker; in a way, they are a sort of deferred salary. However, when the number and income of workers fall, the whole system can collapse. In addition, social protection for unemployed people may give rise to a benefit culture which, with the intention of providing assistance, actually does harm to the worker by negating the role of work in a person's life.<sup>9</sup>

The precariousness of employment, that is, insecure jobs tied to very short-term contracts without any guarantee of continuity, is another problem that is taking on a global scale. In fact, globalization itself and technological progress are direct causes of this precariousness, because they destroy jobs and create uncertainty. Technology, which makes human life better and easier in many aspects, also becomes perceived as an enemy of mankind.

The relationship between work and other human activities, i.e., non-work, is also undergoing significant change. The demands made by employers, on one hand, and the increased cost of living and the constant growth in people's needs, as beings open to an infinite range of possibilities, on the other hand, is pushing many people to devote many hours to work, reducing the time spent with the family or devoted to leisure activities and other non-utilitarian uses of time that are a manifestation of man's spiritual nature. When taken to extremes, excessive devotion to work may become addictive, with harmful consequences for the worker, his family and society as a whole.

What gives meaning to work? Basically, the consideration in which it is held by the agent and by others. An instrumental, non-expressive job that does not develop human abilities is unlikely to have any meaning. A functional job will get results, but it is unlikely that these results

---

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. F.G. CASTLES, *The Future of the Welfare State. Crisis Myths and Crisis Realities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004; B. MARIN, *The Future of Welfare in a Global Europe*, Routledge, London 2015.



will include self-realization. A job in which the person works isolated from others may elicit feelings of pride or satisfaction, but is unlikely to give complete fulfilment. The keys to work are to be found in the dignity of the person who works, in work's capacity to express the human condition, its ability to transform the person, the pursuit of other people's good and the common good, and in its fulfilment of God's will.<sup>10</sup>

Another issue of considerable current interest is what has been called the future of work. The possibility of not finding or losing a job has always been a cause of worry, for reasons that we have explained earlier; but even at the height of economic crises, nobody has ever questioned that work will always be necessary and, therefore, there will always be work, albeit more or less skilled and more or less well paid. However, today, this thesis is being seriously challenged, mainly by technological progress, which has replaced, or is expected to replace, many jobs with machines.<sup>11</sup>

And this raises a lot of questions. Which jobs will bear the brunt? Probably, many unskilled jobs that basically require physical effort, because machines can do that better than people. But also more skilled jobs that compete with computers in processing large volumes of information in a short time. The jobs least affected by this change will probably be certain skilled jobs, such as managers and researchers, and those that require the person's physical presence or certain qualities that robots or computers are not (yet?) capable of replicating. In other words, it is likely that the highly paid jobs at the top of the skill range and the low-paid jobs at the bottom will survive, to the detriment of a broad band in the middle. And this possibility is worrying experts, politicians and, obviously, the workers themselves, particularly the younger ones.

---

<sup>10</sup> The reader will find some interesting contributions to this subject throughout the book, for example, in Chapter 5, written by Domènec Melé.

<sup>11</sup> There is also an abundant literature on this subject. Cfr. K. GRINT, S. WOOLGAR, *The Machine at Work. Technology, Work and Organization*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1997; J. RIFKIN, *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York (NY) 1995; B. STIEGLER, *Automatic Society. Vol. 1. The Future of Work*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2016; R. SUSSKIND, D. SUSSKIND, *The Future of the Professions. How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015; AA.VV. (P. THOMPSON, C. WARHURST, eds.), *Workplaces of the Future*, Macmillan, Houndmills 1998.

However, this pessimistic vision of the future of work is not shared by everyone. The technological revolutions of the past, which threatened to destroy many jobs, ended up creating more employment, driven by that same technology. But, in any case, our societies are faced with very serious problems. What education should be given to future generations to prepare them to take on these challenges? How can the standard of living of those who have borne the brunt of these technological changes be maintained, particularly when, as often happens, they neither have the necessary economic resources nor any capacity for response in the short term? What will be the financial, psychological and social cost of adapting to these changes? And, going beyond the purely economic sphere, what effects will all this have on views about the dignity of work, about the meaning of work, about the vision of companies as communities of people, and about the other dimensions of life?

Obviously, this is not the place for expounding all these problems, and even less for trying to answer them. But we cannot conclude these considerations without insisting that a purely economic approach is not and cannot be the only approach, or even the most appropriate. The individual must be put at the centre of economic activity, of the firm, of the job market and of all human activity. As we explained earlier, people act for very different motives, and not just for economic ones. Consequently, we need to turn to other social sciences to try to account for the person's action from a global perspective. This is the function of philosophy and theology. The human person's centrality cannot be understood without applying a multidisciplinary approach, supported on a realistic philosophy and a theology grounded on solid principles. And this is what the authors of the various chapters in this book try to do, from different viewpoints, as we will see.

## 5. WHAT WILL BE FOUND IN THIS VOLUME

The chapters included in this book comprise 13 papers presented at the Interdisciplinary Congress *The Heart of Work. The Future of Work and its Meaning: New Christian Perspectives 500 Years after the Reformation*, organized by the Faculty of Theology and the Markets, Culture & Ethics Research Centre, affiliated with the *Pontificia Università della Santa Croce*,

in Rome, on 19-20 October 2017. Grouped in three sections, all of them address issues related with economics, the firm and work, based on a dialogue between social sciences and Christian social thought with a clear interdisciplinary intent.

*Work, human development and the Social doctrine of the Church*

In Chapter 1, Gennaro Luise analyses the definitions of work in economics (the pragmatic dimension: the performance of a task), relational sociology (including purposes, material conditions, rules and meanings of work) and philosophical sociology (the dialectics between work as the production of objects and as an introjection of the natural world). After discussing the limitations of other partial attempts, he seeks a complete, non-spiritual, psychophysical, relational definition as an activity that is geared toward attaining the good of the complete unity of the human person.

The traditional conception of economics as a science of rational choices focused on the agent's gratification has been the target of many attempts to move beyond it, proposing broader ends. Happiness is one of these ends and it has been the subject of considerable attention as a manifestation of the person's development, and essential for economic activity. In Chapter 2, Jovi C. Dacanay presents the empirical underpinnings of happiness economics from the psychology, economics and Catholic social thought literature. An empirical study of the determinants of human happiness concludes that people gauge their lives according to the satisfaction of their needs with regard to health, financial freedom, respect, social relations and ability to participate in the community, in accordance with the tenets of Christian-based ethics.

In Chapter 3, Ronald R. Rojas wonders whether adversity is only a threat for the worker or whether it is also an opportunity for self-discovery and maturing as a person through resilience, another manifestation of the worker's human development, and how this response is related with understanding work as a vocation, as a spiritual value. Based on a survey of 516 business management graduates, Rojas shows that vocation at the workplace generates resilience as a reaction to adversity, irrespective of the direction that may be taken by causality, because

coping with adversity is also a means for deepening the commitment to the calling.

In Chapter 4, Martin Fero reviews the sociological theories that interpret societal attitudes about work and, in particular, the influence of religious affiliation in these attitudes. Fero uses the information gathered in the *European Value Study 2008* to give account of the different attitudes to work and workers' expectations regarding work, especially among young people, grouping by age, generation (especially the baby boomers and generations X and Y), marital status and the religion that the person professes.

In Chapter 5, Domènec Melé reviews the contributions made by the literature on the organizational studies that address "meaningful work", i.e., work with an objective purpose and meaning perceived by the subject, and compares them with Christian social thought, which provides a substantive "meaning of work". The dialogue between the two conceptions helps enrich and perfect our conception of work and its meaning.

Language use in economics is not neutral; words have a philosophical substantiation which is not always acknowledged. In Chapter 6, Megan Arago reviews the attempt by Mons. John A. Ryan to make the Social doctrine of the Catholic Church more accessible to the North American public. Exploring the ontological distinction between state, society and Church, Arago points out that the concept of subsidiarity, as used by Mons. Ryan, owes more to American progressivism, expounded by the economist Richard T. Ely, than to the Social doctrine of the Church. And she concludes that Mons. Ryan confuses subsidiarity with the rule of utility, leaving workers' associations, which the Popes had tried to protect, in a situation of vulnerability with respect to the State.

*Economics, enterprise and common good*

In Chapter 7, Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach, in an edited version of the lecture he gave at the Congress, talks about his experience in the business world, particularly in finance. He critically reviews the firm's purpose, as presented in the neoclassic economic literature, comparing it with the positions of academics and employers who draw from Christian social thought. He then outlines some of the responsibilities that professionals

have, such as the balance between work and personal life, the role of the firm's culture in people's conduct and reputational risk, and the practice of whistleblowing. He develops his ideas from the concept of work as a vocation; citing Bonhoeffer, Lord Griffiths argues that vocation means responsibility and responsibility must be a total response by all of man to all of reality, which precludes reducing the person's responsibility to a narrow definition of professional duties.

Work is a human action which we normally perform jointly with other people within an organization. In Chapter 8, Antonio Argandoña develops a theory of action based on the person and his motivations; when this action takes place in an organization—that is, when it is a shared action—it is determined by a purpose and certain motivations, which may or may not be shared, and requires coordination, which is usually the task of the manager. The main outcome of this is trust.

In Chapter 9, Cristina Quaranta and Emiliano Di Carlo inquire into the firm's objectives and, in particular, whether these objectives include the common good and, more specifically, how it can be known whether a firm that portrays itself as socially responsible bases its conduct on the logic of common good. They develop what would be a business model based on this objective and how it would be reflected in their mission statement and code of ethics, and they verify this by analysing the content of the statements of a selection of Italian companies acknowledged for their social responsibility and included in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index.

The right to work is complemented with other rights, such as workers' right to a healthy workplace and society's right to a clean environment. In Chapter 10, Ciro De Angelis reflects on these rights and their connection with the dignity of the human person in the Social doctrine of the Church—particularly in the teachings of Saint John Paul II—and in the Italian Constitution. As a starting point for his reflection, he takes up from the environmental disaster caused by the steel plant operated by Ilva, a company in Taranto (Italy), and the speeches given by the Roman pontiffs Paul VI and John Paul II on the occasion of their visits to that city, in 1968 and 1989, respectively.

*Technology and the challenges of work*

The last section of this book is focused on the future of work and its relations with technology. Chapter 11 provides an introduction to the problems arising from the relationship between technology in the workplace and the worker's dignity; it is an edited version of Martin Schlag's presentation at the Congress round table on *Economics and Work: The Future of Work and the Dignity of the Worker*. Schlag recapitulates some optimistic and pessimistic outlooks with respect to the future of work, and reviews the arguments given to defend them, advising caution in any appraisal of these societal changes, which are profound, long-lasting and with a significant impact on human life and the dignity of the person.

In Chapter 12, Michael Pacanowsky also discusses the impact of technology on work, coming to an optimistic conclusion based on a case study of the firm W. L. Gore & Associates. Pacanowsky points out that there are two models of work organization, one based on maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain, and another that places emphasis on human flourishing, commitment and the meaning of work. He concludes by predicting that professionals' work will undergo significant changes in the near future.

Like the other authors in this section, in Chapter 13 Valeria Fratocchi Invernizzi refuses to accept that the future of work will be decided deterministically by technological change; on the contrary, she says, it will be the outcome of decisions made freely and consciously by managers, political leaders and the workers themselves, although taking into account the challenges posed by technology in preparing people for work, in the quality of work and its impact on people, families and communities. She discusses the so-called 3D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) jobs; the "golden cages" that imprison workers who are paid to do nothing; the existence of obsolete labour regulations and an education that harks back to the past rather than address future challenges.

Taken together, these chapters offer an interesting interdisciplinary view of work, the firm and economic activity. The Social doctrine of the Church rests on faith and reason, that is, on the social sciences, approaching the work of man from different starting points but which, neverthe-

less, may provide a good foundation for the development of Christian social thought. In these chapters, we see how economics, psychology, sociology, political science and the other disciplines are grounded on an often implicit but not always consistent anthropology. The common ground shared by these sciences, on one hand, and, on the other hand, philosophy and theology, all of them enlightened by faith grounded in Scripture and Tradition, allows for a balanced development of the centrality of the person, which is essential for any understanding of human work. Ultimately, as the chapters included in this book show, work takes its value from the supreme value of the human person.

# I. WORK, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE





# HUMAN WORK AND ECONOMY. A METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE

Gennaro Luise\*

**Abstract.** *The aim of this contribution is to apply some metaphysical category to the phenomenon of human work such as the matter-form relation and the notion of non-material relation to the material world, to the phenomenon of human work. Human work would be seen both from a sociological and a metaphysical point of view. We'll start from a general question about which is real richness and real poverty in human working activity. After this we will consider a first, superficial and "pragmatic" definition of human work, that we'll try to overcome both through a presentation of Donati's doctrine on work and through a reconsideration of the doctrine of corporeity, in order to resolve the dialectic alternative between work as a production of objects and as an "introjection" of the natural world as presented in Hegel's Idealism. Our conclusion aims to be an answer to the general question that we started with, gained though our proposal of a non-spiritualistic definition of human work.*

**Keywords:** work, metaphysics, matter-form, corporeity, spiritualistic-materialistic alternative, relational sociology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The aim of this essay is to develop a consideration of the relationship between human work and economy, both from a sociological and a philosophical point of view or, better, to apply some metaphysical categories, such as the matter-form relation and the notion of non-material relation to the material world, to the phenomenon of human work. I present here in an attempt of synthetic view, the whole articulation of the essay:

---

\* Pontificia Università della Santa Croce (Roma).

2. General question: What is real poverty (and real richness) in human work?
3. Human work is generally exposed to a “pragmatic” approach that considers it as a “task execution” and that seeks the real value of the work in a dynamic tool-task relationship, often conceived as a capacity of “acceleration” of a material process in execution. This account of human work tends to consider human workers from an instrumental point of view, such as tools in a process, and is also the deep reason of social injustice and economic divide.
4. A more complete definition of human work should consider a wider set of conditions and characteristic:
  - 4.1. From a sociological point of view Donati (2001 and 2015; cfr. *infra*, footnote n. 1) defines goals, material conditions, norms and senses of the working activity. I would then propose a tentative and relational definition of the contemporary values and meanings of the work.
  - 4.2. From a philosophical point of view, I propose to rethink the doctrine of corporeity, in order to resolve the dialectic alternative between work as a production of objects and as an “introjection” of the natural world, in a different way from Hegel (1992, 1975 and 1976; cfr. *infra*, footnote n. 5).
5. An ambivalent definition of work as an activity of production or as an activity of introjection of the “world” leads symmetrically to a double definition of the values of working activity itself, one side focusing on the material conditions (often and erroneously intended only as an economical relevance) and the other insisting on the spiritual value (often and erroneously intended only as a “virtual” relevance).
6. This clarification (as sketched in point 4.2) of the matter-spirit relation is the philosophical ground for a non-spiritualistic definition of human work, that integrates Donati’s analysis of sociological and relational aspects (as sketched in point 4.1).
7. In conclusion, my reflection would be and attempt of answering the question I put at the beginning: What are real poverty and real richness in human work? My answer would rest on the definition

of work as an activity tending to achieve the good of the complete psycho-physical and relational unity of the human person.

2. GENERAL QUESTION: WHAT IS REAL POVERTY (AND REAL RICHNESS) IN HUMAN WORK?

Let us start from a general question: what is real poverty (and real richness) in human work? Our reflection here, starts from the notion of Possession as a category of being. *Habitus* is a kind of predication belonging to the category of quality, the latter operating on the simple framework of similar and dissimilar in relation to a maximum or archetypical instantiation, implying not a quantity, but a general matter as an identity or a convenience.

3. HUMAN WORK FROM A "PRAGMATIC" POINT OF VIEW

Human work is generally exposed to a "pragmatic" approach that considers it as a "task execution" and that seeks the real value of work in a dynamic tool-task relationship, often conceived as a capacity of "acceleration" of a material process in execution. This account of human work tends to consider human workers from an instrumental point of view, such as tools in a process, and is also the deep reason of social injustice and economic divide. Very often, the retribution for a work is in conditions of lack of balance between effort and human quality of the performance (frequently low profiled), from one side, and real pay-off of the working activity, from the other side (real material retribution/virtual possibility of "human" fruition of material goods).

4. TOWARDS A MORE COMPLETE DEFINITION OF HUMAN WORK

A more complete definition of human work should consider a wider set of conditions and characteristics.

#### 4.1. *A sociological point of view*

From a sociological point of view, I present here my personal lecture of Pierpaolo Donati's<sup>1</sup> doctrine of work in order to define goals, material conditions, norms and senses of the working activity as series of elements generated from space, time, order and final end representation, that is dimensions of human personhood. I would then propose a tentative and relational definition of the contemporary values and meanings of the work, in a symmetrical relationship with the four dimensions/series just mentioned. From a sociological point of view, these are the defining elements of human work:

1. (Material Conditions): series according to space;
2. (Goals): series according to time;
3. (Norms): series according to idea of justice (*ordo*);
4. (Senses, Meanings): series according to the purpose, towards the final end.

Following this way, we can define, according to Donati<sup>2</sup>, the axes of a contemporary account of the meaning of work:

1. Exchange values (in social economic);
2. Production of primarily goods' use values;
3. Mutual service relationship;
4. Activity with extra-economical relevance.

An emblematic case-study of Donati's analysis<sup>3</sup>, is the parallel between the history of human work and money. If money is reduced to currency, then the work is reduced to performance, and human thought,

---

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. P. DONATI, *Il lavoro che emerge. Prospettive del lavoro come relazione sociale in una economia dopo-moderna*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2001; IDEM, *L'enigma della relazione*, Mimesis, Milano 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. IDEM, *Il lavoro che emerge*, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. *ibidem*, 189-197. I sketch here the key points of Donati's analysis: a) money is the currency held or desired by someone. Money is the currency *plus* a human subject; b) why governments keep reserving the exclusive right to mint the currency? We can think of societies with several moneys and different currencies; c) work (like money) is clean or dirty, good or bad; d) the State produces currency (employment), while civil society creates money (work); e) the occupation has functional equivalent, and on the other side the work is a comprehensive and over-functional relationship; f) currency Anarchism is unacceptable, but that doesn't mean that there cannot be different forms of money; g) the work does not end, employment does; h) employment has taken the

claimed as immaterial and as overseeing to the finalistic orientation of human work, to bargaining chip.

In a parallel analysis, if we confuse work and occupation we're not able to accede to the very inner sense of this human activity in itself. Having this stated, I'm searching for a way to abandon the alternative vision of work and/vs spirit, as a specific case of the general alternative between matter and spirit, or the vision that considers work as a strictly material occupation redeemed by a spiritual purpose (spiritualism of work). If we intend to virtualize the good produced by labour, then in parallel we "materialize" the function and the operation itself. If we do not find an intrinsic purposiveness in the single action, then we'll incur in the vain search for a general purpose of the activity as a whole: that's exactly what distinguishes knowledge in act (*energeia*) from knowledge as dynamic activity (*kinesis*)<sup>4</sup>. Alternatively, if we start from the definition of work as relational activity, then we can consider a perspective that eliminates the dialectical oppositions of modernity.

#### 4.2. *A metaphysical perspective*

From a philosophical point of view, I propose to rethink the doctrine of corporeity, in order to resolve the dialectic alternative between work as a production of objects and as an "introjection" of the natural world, in a different way from Hegel<sup>5</sup>: the idealistic doctrine fails because of thinking matter and corporeity as a sort of spirit considered under

---

place of work; i) metallic currency traditionally seen as a sample-value, as an exchange medium and as a hoarding tool. Now, we observe a logical separation between those functions and a permanence of the symbolic representation function (of the transaction made); l) the real money referent disappears as the currency remains valid only in certain restricted areas, *idem* for work in general.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. ARISTOTELE, *Metafisica*, IX, 6, 1048b 30-35, for the distinction between *kinesis* and *energeia* as different kind of movement.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Jenaer Systementwürfe I (Das System der spekulativen Philosophie 1803/04): Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 6, hrsg. v. K. Düsing u. H. Kimmmerle, Meiner, Hamburg 1975; IDEM, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III (Realphilosophie 1805/06): Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 8, hrsg. v. R.P. Horstmann u. J.H. Trede, Meiner, Hamburg 1976; IDEM, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 20, hrsg. v. W. Bonsiepen u. H.-C. Lucas (unt. Mitarbeit v. U. Rameil), Meiner, Hamburg 1992.

“extensive” and “divisible” conditions. But extension cannot be reduced to a pure negation.

In this section I attempt a theoretical discussion of the problem of the matter-spirit relationship inspired to the treatment of such a problem made by Hegel, in a dispute with modern philosophical systems, at the beginning of his *Anthropology*; that is, §389 (and related *Anmerkung* and *Zusatz*) of the *Encyclopedia*. In order to sketch the line of my inquiry, I briefly state here the terms of the difficulty.

a) Spirit and matter: Idealism and Realism

The first and higher confrontation with the contradiction could be found, where the material-spirit relationship is the object of thought in its highest thematic form, that is to say, the relationship between the Absolute and the world itself. The paradox seems to be defined as the complex boundary line that divides the sheer irrationality from that rationality marked by the divine or absolute thinking that is, for the human intellect, only an object of intuition in a, so to speak, fruitful defeat in representative activity, suspended between the absurd and the mysterious. Spatiality and the extension are conceived as qualitatively different to the Creator, both in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition as well as in the Platonic-Augustinian, or in the sphere of those systems that inherit from their ancient antecedents the fundamental dualism that considers the matter and spirit as irreducible. Only Leibniz promotes an idea of matter as energy solidification paradoxically compatible with the creation by a pure Spirit, although this line of thinking poses the problem of assimilating energy in a (modern) physical sense to the spirit in a philosophical sense. We can start with a strict consideration of the *status* of the Absolute being in connection with the determination of space and time. To maintain a radical discontinuity between spirit and matter is incompatible with a notion of spirit that possesses *eminenter*, albeit not *formaliter*, all perfections of being, including the spatiality. Precisely in this sense, the classical doctrine of the transcendentals allows us to point to a convergence of being and unity, and then to distinguish the strong unity of spirit from the divisible unity proper to extension. In the final analysis, this path leads, in consequence, to thinking of matter as a sort

of «numb, blurred, ultimately unconscious *psyche*». But the extension cannot be reduced to a pure negativity—incompatible logically and then metaphysically, we would add—with the pure positivity of the Absolute.

It seems possible to say that there is an essential difference between spatiality and temporality: in fact the eternal and the temporal truly possess that relationship which, in the traditional perspective, is mistakenly attributed to spirit and matter. What is temporal is indeed nothing other than what is-not-yet or no-longer-is, and hence it is defined negatively vis-à-vis that which is simpliciter. By contrast, to maintain that extension coincides with divisibility presupposes an undue inclusion of spatiality within that temporal horizon outside of which no whole whatsoever can be thought of as being divided. While temporality is in no way compatible with any predication of inherence in primary substance, spatiality seems to be incompatible with such predication only if it is considered as present *formaliter* in the Absolute; whereas it would not appear to be so if it were seen as present *eminenter* in the Absolute, as a perfection reducible to spirit. A valid argument on this point would revolve around the attempt to show that even *eminenter* spatiality is not reducible to spirituality, which is why the extension could be originally included as a perfection among the essential determinations of the Absolute.

Then, for a better determination of the idea of the presence of spirituality and spatiality in God, we note that this task is revealed as too large for the forces of human thought. Following this line of thought, although we cannot accept the monism of Spinoza, the thinker who more than any other walked the arduous path that has emerged here, the opening of the issue of «matter in God» generates interesting prospects for the development of the logos of the revelation which, within this area, seems to have recourse to its highest levels. And this is not an inappropriate theme to concern with, when we consider Hegel philosophy.

The very idea of a *metaphysical* corporeity is non-contradictory only if corporeality is a determination present *formaliter* in the Absolute being as an equal of spirituality, which could never contain it *eminenter*



transvaluing spiritualising it<sup>6</sup>. The Absolute, or the original dimension of being, is *formally* ad not *only eminently* spatial, while it is *not formally nor eminently* temporal. Otherwise corporeality would be formally (and eminently) incompatible with the spirituality of the Absolute, while it would be only formally incompatible as a property of the metaphysical body, as it would be only transvalued in the spirit, this transvaluation coinciding with a simple consideration of the matter out of the temporality. But temporality, as we stated at the beginning, is a property we can correctly separate from the material extension in itself. In other words, the resurrected body is conceivable only if it is not simply the immortal soul, but if it is also an unitary and indivisible (immortal) body and not a spiritualised one, in which case it should be such only eminently and non *formaliter*, and this last is incompatible with the property of a bodily metaphysical permanence<sup>7</sup>.

In consonance with this argument, which tends to show the impossibility of understanding spatiality as a determination *eminenter* re-absorbed in the spirit, one could say that the effort of understanding spatiality as reducible to (or deducible from) the spirit is in vain in as much as it is modelled on the ideal and conceptual-representative human relationship which is projected anthropomorphically to describe the relationship between God and the idea that God has of the world, or rather the *status* of the ideas within God.

---

<sup>6</sup> From the point of view of Divine Revelation, and in order to somehow think the doctrine of resurrection of bodies, it is then clear that the glorious bodies are not the only "non-worldly" or metaphysical corporeal entities as the meaning of the incarnation of the Word becomes clear as well as the meaning of likeness between God as Absolute and man. For this section, see D. SACCHI, *Le ragioni di Abramo. Kierkegaard e la paradossalità del logos*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2011, 13-20.

<sup>7</sup> The classic distinction between *eminenter* and *formaliter*, in a discussion of the *status* of the transcendent principle of the world in connection with the world itself and spatiality, draws on the distinction that Descartes poses (in *Secundae Responsiones, Rationes Dei existentiam et animae a corpore distinctionem probantes more geometrico dispositae, Definitiones III-IV*), in its turn echoing scholastic terminology, between what is «*formaliter* in idearum objectis, quando talia sunt in ipsa qualia illa percipimus; et *eminenter*, quando non quidem talia sunt, sed tanta, ut talium vicem supplire possint». In both cases, according to Descartes, this involves determinations of the objective side of ideas, identical in *idea et in objectis*.

## b) The absoluteness of mediation

In its essential characterization of idealism definition, Gustavo Bontadini<sup>8</sup> does not fail to consider the direction of thought to himself as a reversal of the consideration of the object; a movement that goes towards a new consideration of the object of thought within the subject. Reversing, the latter, which coincides with that reversal «of the intention or cognitive movement from his direction oriented to the absolute being, to an orientation to the pure thought»<sup>9</sup>, decisive as it marks «the transition from phenomenalism to idealism: from the conception of reality as appearance, to the consideration of the reality as a Subject; from the critique of metaphysics to a *new* metaphysics, the metaphysics of mind»<sup>10</sup>. But notice that according Bontadini this passage from one to another *moment* is made legitim, and even necessary, by the fact that phenomena are contents of consciousness. Knowing activity is defined precisely by the absence of his own «presence» in favour of the manifestation of being that is present and given in it; since, Bontadini says, knowing is the same being as manifest, it follows that this identity cancels all distinctions «between the being and itself, and stands as the same *intimacy*, the same essence of the being»<sup>11</sup>.

To affirm that this principle is not defining of idealism more than it is defining realism, or rather, classical metaphysics in its Thomistic version, entails for Bontadini also the occasion for remembering that any distinction or separation, that should appear in reality after the idealist identification in reality, would be attributed to a aporetic principle valid outside the knowledge and as such, outside the realm of being. This external principle should be identified with and reduced to what here seems to correspond, beyond these considerations, such as the purer and more charged of paradox definition of the idea of «matter».

But such a difficulty (*aporia*) should not *detract* away from the consideration of knowledge as essence or *vinculum substantiale* of the being and also from the correlative perfection, identical, by definition, or closely

---

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. G. BONTADINI, *Studi sull'idealismo*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1995<sup>2</sup>, 282.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem* (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

related, *of one towards the other* of the two *modus*, namely being and knowledge. Even more, to recall the doctrine of intentional identity of the known and the knower, distinguished by virtue of the *form dematerialization* in its intentional-being from «pure and full» ontological identity, implies to parallel recall a certain primacy of intentional identity upon the actual and real, and by this way, if the actual distinction between form and matter is kept at level of *synolon* entitative union, under the intentional aspect the object form becomes in reality subject.

Then *idealism* that has stated itself as intimacy of thought to the phenomena, is an improper idealism, one might affirm, as the true idealism is a doctrine that unites this condition of thinking with the unproven assumption that there is an additional dimension further to the immediate or intuitive representation content or, in other words, that intentionality does not stop at this stage but turns itself in a non-representative form, to an «object» that we must assume as not given in the representation but that we should believe, with further assumption, as responsible of the influence on our sensibility that is at the end direct cause of our «feeling». And so, to sum up this discussion, only in an *apertis verbis* phenomenalist condition, like the one that involves the dual assumption that we have now designed, it can be said that the doctrine of the identity of being and thought does generate a true idealism, or rather something that could be called the essence of idealism.

If, for a finite mind, the lawful *mediation* always starts from immediate to reach, indirectly, an immediate, then the vision of the act of mediation would be self-destroying for a thought that is incapable to draw the ultimate mediation term, without which the thought would precisely remain in possession only of that single mediation act, a contradictory pure mediation. But this side reveals that idealism, as well as the historically previous phenomenalist position, implies the absolute-ness of mediation, which is in itself a contradiction, but constitutes the only way to avoid once more to mutate idealism into realism, since, on the contrary, to exclude epistemological transcendence of the absolute, means having «achieved a representation of the absolute and to terminate the movement of thought, and have become realists»<sup>12</sup>. Bontadini affirms that idealism, as the phenomenism, involves the affirmation of

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 287.

transcendence, without which the idealism, having become an absolute idealism, would coincide with the absolute realism.

c) Matter as a “perfection”

The only way to affirm a metaphysical consistence of the world is to assume the absolute as a principle of the matter itself and not only of the spirit. But this consideration involves a radical question upon the transcendence of the Absolute. Either we consider the matter as positively perfect in the Absolute independently without the spirit, or there is no possibility to think it. Then the material perfection is a perfection and is a perfection of the Absolute in itself: matter is not self-contradictory; it's neither “one” nor “many”, but it is not identical to it-self<sup>13</sup>.

d) Hegel on the “spiritual” meaning of human work

After a theoretical consideration of the relationship between Spirit and Matter from an Idealistic point of view (section 4.2.1), and after an overview of Gustavo Bontadini interpretation of the essential doctrine of Idealism (sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3), we can recall here the young Hegel reflexions upon the “Spiritual” meaning of human work.

The Elevation (*Aufhebung*) of nature is achieved through the passage from the individual spirit, which is still an ideal moment of existence of the spirit, and through mutual recognition (*anerkennen*), towards an overcoming of the distinction between the individual's own consciousnesses, that become aware of themselves in the positional act of their form as an objective reflection on intellectual and voluntary act, gaining an organization of “collective people” as a real substance and universal ethics. A similar view is gained in *Jenenser Stystemwürfe* through the dialectic “exposition” of consciousness that produces, using the instrument as a *medium* related to work power, the fulfilment of a necessary stimulus;

---

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the paradox of divisibility, see C. ANTONOPOULOS, *The quantum logic of Zeno: Misconceptions and Restorations*, «Acta Philosophica» 16 (2013) 265-84.

this awareness comes ultimately to an awareness of itself as «ideality of removing» the impulse (*Trieb*).

The product itself of imagination and thought, must attain its stable denomination, in the moment of language, prior to the actual work of the practical activity; at the very beginning of the thought activity, to act on himself will be equivalent to «bring out» himself: «This work is therefore the first inner work on himself, an entirely non-sensitive activity and the beginning of spirit's free elevation, as it has here itself as an object»<sup>14</sup>. The tool for the job, like the name and the language for the memory, is considered as a means against the simple "statement" (claim) of need; as well as the medium remains in relation to the purpose, as it allows an infinite number of instances of an identical purpose, and then an extended relation to the realm of objectivity.

#### 5. AN AMBIVALENT DEFINITION OF WORK

An ambivalent definition of work as an activity of production or as an activity of introjection of the "world" (an evolution and more complex version of the procedural and pragmatic conception of work resumed here in paragraph 3) leads symmetrically to a double definition of the values of working activity itself, one side focusing on the material conditions (often and erroneously intended only as an economical relevance) and the other insisting on the spiritual value (often and erroneously intended only as a "virtual" relevance). This clarification (as sketched in paragraph 4.2) of the matter-spirit relation is the philosophical ground for a non-spiritualistic definition of human work, that integrates Donati's analysis of sociological and relational aspects (as sketched in paragraph 4.1).

#### 6. A NON-SPIRITUALISTIC DEFINITION OF HUMAN WORK

A non-spiritualistic definition of human work would constitute, in my opinion, a positive evolution in the new building-*paradigma* of a

---

<sup>14</sup> G.W.F. HEGEL, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III (Realphilosophie 1805/06): Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 8, hrsg. v. R.P. Horstmann u. J.H. Trede, Meiner, Hamburg 1976, 194.

Christian Humanism; if we consider the “material side” of work as a “negative”, “heavy” dimension that could only be tolerated weather it is redeemed by an intellectual-spiritualistic superstructure, we could consider as a “real humanisation” of the work, the paradoxical condition in which we have “poor” workers (for example, lacking even of time to cultivate their personhood), living in a relation “with the human good of the work” that is simply and only virtual: a superficial perception of possessing goods or a projection in an immaterial (in an incorrect sense) dimension, but not a “good life” experienced in the deepest dimension, a perception and a projection that could be judged, falsely, as “richness”.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The whole body of the moral and intellectual virtues required for this “redemption”, makes it almost impossible to actually pursue them in ordinary life. The only thing that we should require the worker to pursue would be the ability to effectuate a timeless contemplation of his own work. He must understand it as something in itself permanent. The production of the entities arising from work covers a sector that classical metaphysics was able to think only with great difficulty. That is the realm of the freely designed beings and achieved in mind, even before they become real artefacts, by a subject that causes as a free cause. The difficulty is related to the fact that the free subject causes in a necessary way, while the absolute subject actually causes as totally free. This conceptual sequence constitutes a paradox. To solve this, the material has to be conceived as a co-principle of the being and should not be redeemed “from outside” or through an external “thought”. Simply it has to be conceived in a timeless form, as unique, incorruptible and unrepeatable. In conclusion, my reflexion would be and attempt of answering the question I put at the beginning: What are real poverty and real richness in human work? My answer would rest on the definition of work as an activity tending to achieve the good of the complete psycho-physical and relational unity of the human person, as synthetized in point 5 of the present synthesis. Real poverty would be a situation in which our single work will be reduced to functional occupation, without the capacity of attain a full set of relational aspects of the work

activity and without the capacity of acting as a permanent creator of a permanent good. And that's not a generalization of one's own work and an insertion in a wider perspective, that could be done, but in addition to the fundamental movement, the latter being rather a concentration on the positivity on matter and its "gravity" I should say<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. A. SEN, *La libertà individuale come impegno sociale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1990, 23 sgg.