

BENEFIT AND TOIL – WORK FROM THE PERSONALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

BENEFICIUL ȘI EFORTUL ÎN MUNCĂ DIN PERSPECTIVA PERSONALISTICĂ

Dariusz ADAMCZYK, Ph.D., professor

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Cracow, Poland

Abstract. The article discusses the issue of human work and its subjectivity from the personalistic point of view as a universal means of a human being integral development. Work and the human being who experiences its toil and strenuousness have always been clearly connected. Work toil is described in the finality context as an element present in the process of individual and social development of a human being.

Rezumat. Articolul discută problema muncii umane și subiectivitatea ei din punct de vedere personalist ca mijloc universal de dezvoltare integrală a unei ființe umane. Munca și ființa umană care își simte dificultatea și oboseala au fost mereu clar înrudite. Efortul în muncă este descris în contextul finalității ca element prezent în procesul de dezvoltare individuală și socială a unei ființe umane.

Key words: work, personalism, vocation, toil, development.

Cuvinte cheie: muncă, personalism, vocație, efort, dezvoltare.

The term ‘work’ applies to few different meanings¹ and, thus, it should be emphasized that the article focuses on human work[22] which John Paul II describes: “Through work man must earn his daily bread (cf. *Ps* 127(128):2; cf. also *Gen* 3:17-19; *Prov.* 10:22; *Ex* 1:8-14; *Jer* 22:13) and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself”[15].

Although John Paul II, in his definition, does not determine which activities are or are not to be called human work, he accentuates a significant connection between work and a human being. In this perspective, the idea of the universalism of human work is perceived which makes its value remain a current issue. If work distinguishes man and fills his life [15] therefore it is worth pointing to its benefit as well as to its role in man’s life as the necessary means for personal development. However one should not overlook the toil accompanying its performance.

1. Man’s vocation to work

Human work constitutes the basic dimension of man’s life on earth since man has been called upon to do it from the very beginning. As early as the moment of creation,

¹ In *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, there are five definitions of the word ‘work’: 1. «purposeful activity of man towards creating material or artistic goods». 2. «an artistic or scientific creation». 3. «employment; also: one’s place of employment». 4. «functioning of the body or equipment». 5. «the transfer of energy from one physical system to another, especially the application of a forceto move a body in a certain direction».

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the first people receive the instruction to: “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen* 1:28). It is about the second part of the instruction telling man to ‘subdue it.’ The word ‘work’ does not appear in the statement, however, these words contain the indirect indication to work as an indispensable part of human life. Work is an inseparable activity of man which must be carried out during his lifetime. John Paul II explains that “the term ‘the earth’ the biblical text speaks of is to be understood in the first place as that fragment of the visible universe that man inhabits. By extension, however, it can be understood as the whole of the visible world insofar as it comes within the range of man’s influence and of his striving to satisfy his needs.”² ‘Earth’ is thus at man’s disposal [16].

Man needs to take advantage of all the nature’s resources and manage them through work which is the only means for this task. “And to be able through his work to make these resources bear fruit, man takes over ownership of the small parts of the riches of nature: those beneath the ground, those in the sea, on land, or in space. He takes all these things over by making them his workbench. He takes them over through work and for work”³. Through work, man participates in the legacy of nature’s resources (given to all the people) as well as in the legacy elaborated by others (participation in the development of technology and the improvement of tools). This is the way of describing the process of man’s work (from the theological and humanistic points of view) in which we can discover the dependence of the nature’s resources on the Giver, other people and their contribution through which the possibilities of work have become extended and improved nowadays [30, 8, 1].

It is worth noting that complying with God’s instruction to ‘subdue the earth’, man is obliged to mirror the Creator’s actions yet not any actions at all. Work is the resemblance of man to God for man has been created as God’s image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26) thus as such should reshape and improve the world created by Him. It would not have been possible without the power of reason and free will. This resemblance of man to God justifies the idea of man’s work and the vocation of man to rule over other creatures: “let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground” (*Gen* 1:26). It is about the power man has received from the Creator [9, 27, 33, 2].

Man’s authority over the creatures is the king’s authority. It connects inseparably with the idea expressed in *Psalms* 8 on God’s glory extended to man in the moment of creation: “you have crowned him with glory and beauty, made him lord of the works of your hands, put all things under his feet” (*Ps* 8:6-7). Two Hebrew words *kabod* and *hadar* (glory and beauty) translated into Polish language describe both attributes of king (cf. *1 Kgs* 3:13; *Ps* 21:6) and God as the King (cf. *Ps* 24:7-10; *Isa* 6:3-5; *Ps* 96:8). When these two terms are ascribed to man they indicate that he should be the king of the creation

² LE 4.

³ LE 12.

which results from his being chosen to participate in the king's authority of God [33, 21] *Kabod* suggests the power yet at the same time beauty, harmony and brightness. God, in his act of creation, transfers to man something from his own beauty which has been accompanied by the two other terms, like truth and good since the ancient times. Man, thus, is called upon to carry out such an activity which imitates God and transcends into nature. This is the method of self-improvement of man [26, 6, 2].

God puts man "in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it" (*Gen 2:15*). It illustrates the idea of serving God and acting according to his commandments. Work is included in this idea and it has been connected with human life from the very beginning. Two verbs that are used in the sentence 'cultivate' and 'take care of' are complementary to one another. These two terms define every kind of man's work as man has been called upon to create and manage the goods [17, 35, 1 - p.80, 2 - p.60].

Thus the dignity of man connects to work which man was obliged to do even in the Eden garden. The significance of work results from participation in the act of creation as well as from acting according to God's will which means understanding the laws contained in every existing thing [4 - p.19, 2 - p.60]. Man who accomplishes the entrusted mission confirms his superiority over the earth. The process is of universal character as it concerns all the people of every epoch.⁴

2. Toil of work

Man's work embodies toil, burden as well as suffering, wrong and injustice. The whole life of man has become burdensome due to the disobedience towards God (cf. *Gen 3:17-19*) which resulted in expelling man from the Eden garden. However, man is still obliged to work (cf. *Gen 3:23*). It should be, nonetheless, noted that work itself is not the result of sin yet it has been accompanied by toil from that time on: "by the sweat of your face will you earn your food" (*Gen 3:19*). It concerns every kind of work not manual work only. Yet, man still performs his domination over the earth [3 - p.91, 12 - p.70, 37 - p.88, 10 - p.114, 18 - p.158, 25 - p.61, 30 - p.128, 11 - p.127, 6 - p.58, 1 - p.80].

Linking work to toil shows frailty of human life on earth and it foretells death. Man is "dust and to dust [he] shall return" (*Gen 3:19*). Yet every instance of overcoming toil is the sign of victory of man over his weakness. It also contributes to his developing his personal maturity. Undertaking toil is the sign of rebuilding ties with God in a spiritual sense. Man is, at the same time, aware that he is unable to regain ties completely by himself. Human toil is fully meaningful only when Jesus Christ makes it so through the perspective of His act of redemption. Through his toil, man has the opportunity to participate in the act of salvation which has been performed by suffering and the cross. In this way, man cooperates in the act of redeeming the whole universe. Personal understanding and acceptance of 'the afflictions of work' unveils the full sense of being

⁴ LE 4.

called upon to work which, at the same time, is the expression of love towards God and other people as well as the means to improve man's life [3 - p.138, 31 - p.45, 37 - p.94, 20 - p.132, 18 - p.159, 25 - p.74, 30 - p.119, 11 - p.130].

Thus work's toil includes some part of the Cross of Christ as the act of redemption. Such deep understanding of work, in the sense of its commonness and toil, unveils its full meaning and benefit which results from work itself. This newly gained benefit while seen from the perspective of Christ's Resurrection is obtained by man and the world through work's toil. In such full understanding of the sense of work, its toil does not humiliate man or his dignity. It refers to man as the subject of work. Consequently, from this perspective connected to the integral development of man, the value of toil should be considered [12 - p.83, 13 - p.50, 19 - p.156, 1 - p.81].⁵

3. Universal means for development

Work is the factor in man's development which, in turn, is the basis for its value and dignity. "Even when it is accompanied by toil and effort, work is still something good, and so man develops through love for work".⁶ Subjective meaning of work takes priority over its objective meaning. Therefore, it is not the kind of work carried out that is important, it is rather a human being who is the subject conditioning work's ethical nature. While man is called upon to work, his vocation is subordinated to personal development. Every work and all its activities are to serve realization of the human nature by means of pursuing personal vocation of man. Accordingly, work should be 'for the benefit of man' and not man 'for the benefit of work'. Work is not the final objective of man, however, man is always the objective of work [7 - p.284, 32 - p.104, 23 - p.223, 25 - p.35, 30 - p.111, 12 - p.72, 13 - p.82, 14 - p.186].⁷

John Paul II writes: "Work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – because through work man not only transfers nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'".⁸ Only from this perspective can we understand the value of diligence which is the moral skill. Man becomes morally good and he realizes himself as a human being, improves and accomplishes himself [24 - p.114, 25 - p.72, 12 - p.74, 34 - p.38, 30 - p.134, 8 - p.84, 4 - p.18, 11 - p.127].

There exists, however, a threat "that in work, whereby matter gains in nobility, man himself should not experience a lowering of his own dignity."⁹ It concerns the threat of treating human work as a 'commodity' or an anonymous 'force' necessary for the production process called 'workforce'. Such threat is in place when man is treated as a tool or the means and not as the subject or the objective of work. Therefore, the

⁵ Cf. LE 27;.

⁶ LE 11.

⁷ Cf. LE 6.

⁸ LE 9.

⁹ LE 9.

connection between diligence and the 'social order of work' seems necessary. Only then does man work without degrading himself or losing his strength and dignity. On the contrary, he achieves the feeling of complete humanity [24 - p.112, 7 - p.287, 37 - p.93, 22 -p.26, 1 - p.84].

Consequently, the Pope explains that work cannot be only "the exploitation of man's strength for the external activity" for he "must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be, for the "rest" that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends (cf. *Mt 25:21*)."[36 - p.300, 16 - p.11]¹⁰

Work is the natural means for development of man; it is his task and his chance. While under the ordinary conditions, it directs man towards good. Work contributes to discovering good and truth and it increases participation of man in good and it influences the culture of cooperation between people. Man, in this way, realizes his calling, creates community and increases the output of the whole human kind [3 - p.138, p.177, 10 - p.117, 5 - p.292, 30 - p.115, 16 - p.22].

Work is "a foundation for the formation of *family life*, which is a natural right and something that man is called to [...], a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole *process of education* in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education. Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points."¹¹

Work is, simultaneously, of economic, educational and ancillary character which constitutes a vital element in man's personal development moreover it creates and shapes human community. It is because of work that ideas and values function in contemporary earthly reality. Work expresses service for another man and as such is an essential element of man's development and of his subjectivity [20 - p.135, 30 - p.129, 5 - p.296].

Conclusion

Personalistic perspective of work assumes its subjectivity since work in its essence is marked with a person [1 - p.79]. Man called upon to perform work while being its subject, initiator and objective constitutes the value of work. Therefore, apart from the

¹⁰ LE 25.

¹¹ LE 10

economic values, the personal ones are the most vital features of work which result in its value, dignity and meaning.

The basis for man's vocation to work is his creation as 'an image of God'. The duty of work results from the Creator's commandment to work. Man should "subdue the earth" and take advantage of natural resources reasonably. It is an essential contribution to improving oneself as a human being. While being an obligation, work is a calling and a moral duty. It is worth considering work's personalistic nature, its dignity and importance from the salvation perspective. "The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound *motive* for undertaking it in various sectors."¹²

Man takes advantage of the output of many generations and he increases it through his work thus becoming a co-creator of living conditions of future generations. He participates in the realization of God's plan towards the human kind, he develops the Creator's work. He cooperates with God in improving the earthly creation, he also improves living conditions on the earth, reshapes and humanizes the world while undergoing self-improvement. For it is important to make man's life more humane and work plays basic role in this aspect [29].

Work relates to toil and sacrifice. This connection finds its ultimate meaning in the actions of Jesus Christ that work draws inspiration from. Only through sacrifice and the cross can man find hope and meaning in work's toil which results in personal communion of man and God. Such deep transcendental perspective of integral development of man opens possibilities to take advantage of toil as the means for overcoming weaknesses of human nature towards sanctifying himself [1 - p.93].

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¹² LE 25

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