

... "work is a universal vocation, everyone know this..."
John Paul II. "Laborem exercens"

On Human Work and Psychology (of Work) in the Context of Ethics and Market Economics

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At the beginning of my paper, I seek to establish contact, perhaps with a somewhat provocative remark: The Pope expresses a kind of truth, when he says: ... "work is universal vocation, everyone know this...", but with some licence, we may add that this does not apply to psychologists, as I shall attempt to explain in the following text. Of course, I do not mean that psychologists do not work or do not want to work!

The **FORUM 2000** conference was held in Prague last year, as in the previous year, at the beginning of September. Forum 2000 was a meeting of politicians, philosophers, religious people, scientists and other intellectuals from all over the world, who met in Prague at the invitation of the two organizers of the event - Czech president Václav Havel and the writer and Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel.

The conference was concerned with the questions: "Where does humanity stand at the turn of the millennia?", "What threats does it face?" and "What are possible answers to the present global problems?"

One of the participants, Professor Nikolaus Lobkowicz, philosopher, former rector of Munich University and former president of the Catholic University of Eichstätt in Germany, expressed his views on the question of tolerance of differences in human society and in relation to a fairer division of the social product and a fairer evaluation of human work, as follows: "In either case, it is dangerous to naïvely suppose that the invisible hand of the free market will eventually solve all wrongs. The market economy is one of the greatest achievements of modern times, but it does not solve all the problems of human society. On the contrary, it creates new problems" (1997). *One of the most important recent liberal thinkers, the sociologist and political scientist Ralf Gustav Dahrendorf, who perhaps most among philosophers, developed Popper's philosophy of the open society (1997), also spoke in a similar spirit.*

We in Slovakia are already in our tenth year, not only of advantages, but also of the hardships involved in reform of society and transformation of the economy. Economic, together with other effects of economic recession are the price we are having to pay for this openness. Not only ownership relations (privatisation), but also social relations (democratisation) are changing. However, from our own experience, we perceive that market capitalism is far from being a cure-all, or an easy route to a more fairer society.

One of the many examples connected with our profession is the serious **disturbance of the principle of fairness and objectivity in the evaluation and compensation of human work.**

People are losing the feeling, and are no longer sure, more and better quality work is financially and socially more rewarding than less and poorer quality work. This awareness is directly reflected in inter-personal relations, in the motivation of people to work, and in respect for the ethical norms of work-behaviour, which are an essential condition for the economic activity and prosperity of individual organizations and the society as a whole.

Human justice is mainly the objective evaluation of socially beneficial work. The truth is, assuming that you accept this view, that work (understood as meaningful activity aimed at the creation of value) is a corner stone of human existence. This is not only the view of Marxists, but also, for that matter, of Christian philosophers. The 17th century Prešov teacher and theologian Ján Bayer is a lesser-known example. In his work *Ostium naturae* (Door of Nature) he wrote that the basic meaning of human work was an activity close to nature and the naturalness of man. According to him, experience gained through work, was the only effective and real experience.

In this respect, I should like to make a small (I hope not in importance) digression into the unrewarded, overlooked and ignored findings and methods of the psychology of work, and not only, for example, with respect to the somewhat isolated managers in companies undergoing reform, but also to academic institutions. Psychologists in other applied disciplines, for example, clinical psychologists, also have a strong tendency to overlook it, and this is becoming a serious

problem amongst us. The fears of leading psychologists, for example T. Kollárik (1998), of the psychiatrization of psychology, were recently published.

We find similar experiences in other authors.

The French psychologist G. Politzer (1947), of whom a well considered comment can be accepted almost without reservation even after 50 years, wrote: "So far, we have not encountered even one textbook of general psychology, which begins with an exact analysis of the aspects, factors and conditions of work, vocation and so on."

In this context, we might also mention the French psychologist Lucien Séve (1976), who emphasized that psychologists have a strong tendency to orient their attention towards human beings who do not work and have problems in adapting. He was not thinking only of such orientations as psychoanalysis, child psychology or psycho-pathology.

He also stated that understanding of human personality is not possible without appropriate evaluation of work in society. "It is surprising", wrote Lucien Séve, "that apart from a few researchers, we often encounter a strange ignorance of the findings of work psychology, as a small specialized branch in relation to other fields in psychology, or at best - as one of the special sections of psychology.

We are even seeing the development of new sciences of work (for example ergonomics) and studies of the management of human resources, with the perfectly serious aim of explaining the behaviour of persons in a work environment, among other things, on the basis of what we learn from various theories of personality, which actually ignore the work aspect. (*There are honourable exceptions, including Mikšík's Czechoslovakia interaction conception and the fading theories and projects of former Soviet psychologists, such as A.N. Leontiev, B.G. Ananiev, B.F. Lomov, or the Czech J. Linhart*).

This is really a world turned upside-down.

In our post-socialist situation, the remnants of collectivist instincts, *which essentially contain reservations towards any personalities, with the exception of an admired leader*, still cruelly persist.

From goulash communism, which functioned on the basis of the **principle of unfair equality**, *in which some were more equal than others*, we have progressed to **unfair inequality**, which is already becoming evermore apparent, and which automatically make our people think back to the "achievements of socialism" and the five-pointed star.

There are problems that the market cannot solve. They include the fair distribution of income in society - as an important motivating instrument of the productivity of the economy and prosperity of the society as a whole.

Pope John Paul II also pointed to the seriousness of this situation in the global context, in a sermon given in Havana, in the presence of President Fidel Castro. He said:

"The ideological and economic systems of the last centuries often contained the seeds of opposition and division in their programmes. Precisely this has deeply marked the understanding of man and his relations with other people. Some of these systems attempted to reduce religion exclusively to the private level, deprived of any contribution to, or influence on society. In this context, it is good to mention that the modern state cannot make either atheism or religion one of its own political principles.

On the other hand, a certain form of **capitalist neo-liberalism** has developed in many places. It endeavours to subordinate man and the development of nations to the blind forces of commerce, which places unbearable burdens on people. Thus, it often happens that individuals and nations are forced to accept unbearable economic programmes as a condition for the provision of new aid. Excessive enrichment of some occurs at the price of the growing impoverishment of many. The rich become ever richer, while the poor become ever poorer."

The Pope concludes: "all this concerns a truth, which is not only a rational understanding of reality, but a matter of humanity, truth about man, about his rights and obligations."

Since they are essentially universal considerations, they also concern us, the psychologists present today. Perhaps more so because the soul of man is closer to a spiritual than to a material being.

As persons, we are mutually connected - even if we do not know or acknowledge it, or we apparently do not need others. If we want to appraise the dignity of man, it is necessary to appraise it, above all, with a fair and objective appreciation of socially beneficial work.

In human behaviour, there is a clear relationship between the hierarchy of ethical values, and the creation, protection and preservation of economic success. Collective theft of social property, clientelism (the sister of which is corruption), blackmail and parasitism are two sides of the same coin, of ethic and economic destruction. The ethical stability of society or ethical disintegration of society usually has far-reaching results for all aspects of its socio-economic functioning. The opposite relationship also applies: the stability or disintegration of other sub-systems of the socio-economic system is reflected in the stability or disintegration of morality.

In a lecture entitled "*Face to face*" given when receiving an honorary degree from Comenius University, **Cardinal Jozef Tomko** pointed to aspects of the ethical theme, when he said: "it is necessary to emphasize that fairness between government and citizens, leaders and led, clarity in public economic activity, absence of party bias in public service, correct and fair use of public money, rejection of unclear and illegal means of obtaining it, for the maintenance and increase of power, are ethical principles which have their primary root - and extraordinary urgency, in the transcendental (that is non-material) worth of the person and in the objective moral demands of the functioning of states." In an abbreviated quotation from the encyclical "*Veritatis splendor*", he pointed especially to the risk of a Machiavellian alliance between democracy and ethical relativism, which deprives the citizen and society of any form of firm moral support, removing the wish to know the truth and making people only the instruments of power of politicians and a totalitarian understanding of the world (1995).

The heart of the present crisis of social morality lies especially in this area. To ask, here and now, for rights and fairness in rewarding work is a gift of democracy, but is still a significant personal risk. Freedom is always a risk in a way, which we must accept in relation to our profession, so that it continues to be possible to preserve the dignity of human work and moderate clear social injustice. Many of us are not only willing to tolerate this injustice, but are also willing to profit from it. Allegedly, the principles of "business ethics" excuse them. We cannot agree with such commercialisation of human resources, which leads to their undoing, though this may only be "temporary".

We can see this happening in our daily work. For this reason, we also propose that **preservation of professional ethics, respecting the dignity of every person, especially with regard to possible conflicts of interest between employers, employees and the state** should be clearly defined in the standard for the professional work of psychologists, as the main principle of the work of psychologists, guaranteed by legislation and professional regulations.

In their constructive solution, the work-psychologist gives priority to the "principle of use" before the "principle of profit". This is the main ethical foundation of the profession and an essential contribution in favour of the individual, to the prosperity of organisations and the society as a whole (Seifert, I., Koziak, M., 1999).

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