The Ethical Dimension of Work: A Feminist Perspective

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My contribution intends to show that the traditional philosophical concept of work (Marx, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marcuse, Arendt, Habermas, and the rest) leaves out a crucial dimension. Work is reduced, for example, to the interaction with nature, the problem of recognition, or economic self-preservation. But work also establishes an ethical relation having to do with the needs of others and to the common good—a view of work that should be of particular interest for feminist and gender philosophy. This dimension makes visible, as socially necessary work, the so-called reproductive sphere pertaining to giving birth and raising children, but it also generalizes the aspect of care, which plays a significant role in traditional woman's work. The ethical relation to the other is a characteristic feature of human work and in this sense, the possibility of working is a part of a good life.

More than with many other concepts in practical philosophy, work is a thoroughly historical category.[1] Transformations in the economic and technical organization of work call for changes in its the social and cultural dimensions as well as in the self-understanding of individuals engaged in it. By the same token, such transformations influence our basic understanding of work itself—of which activities are to be defined as work at all.[2] In turn, these categorical changes in the nature of work have specific effects on the economic sector. This mutual dynamic thus requires the development of a historically appropriate definition of work that can function as one of the basic concepts within practical philosophy (Riedel 1973). Yet, given changing economic and (sexual-)political conditions, the scope and content of the concept of work should remain open to debate. This being the case, moreover, it is clear that transhistorical claims regarding

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the nature and worth of work for human cultures and humankind should be met with considerable skepticism.

Can work, then, in any way claim the status of a universal category? To provide a satisfactory answer, it is necessary to carefully differentiate between its form and content. Work is indeed an anthropological universal. All known societies organize their subsistence around concrete or abstract forms of work and according to a more or less complex division of labor—of which the sexual division of labor represents a prototype or starting point. As such, it is the philosophical truth of the so-called production paradigm[3] that work is predominantly viewed in terms of a material interaction with nature, whether agrarian or industrial. Working to acquire sustenance (*Lebensmittel*)[4] expresses human society's ties to nature; it forms the umbilical cord, so to speak, through which human cultures are connected with nature insofar as they use its resources to produce and reproduce themselves.

However, *what* is rightly considered to be work and *who* counts as a worker are clearly cultural and historical variables, as the example of the reduction of work to slave labor in antiquity reveals. Setting aside narrow formalistic concerns, the attempt to articulate a concept of work appropriate specifically for the conditions of late modernity requires us to consider a full array of economic, cultural, political, social, and individual aspects associated with work. Only then will it be possible to view work as the important interface between individual and society without rendering its structural and individual significance absolute. Thus one could also regard the problem of work as forming a focal point for one's relation to the world, to oneself, and to society.

Within this essay, I would like to undertake three projects: (1) to explain why the transformation of the philosophical concept of work is one of the genuine tasks of feminist philosophy; (2) to show that the ethical dimension of human work has so far, for quite interesting reasons if viewed from a feminist or gender-theoretical perspective, remained underdetermined in philosophical discourse; and (3) to begin, at a minimum, to justify why socially necessary work can rightfully be understood as a privileged mode of human activity.

From within the scope of feminism, it can be asked why women, including professionals such as economists, sociologists, and philosophers, should reveal as socially necessary the activities traditionally regarded as women's work, while at the same time defending the right to participate in gainful forms of employment.

The Transformation of the Philosophical Concept of Work as a Genuine Task of Feminism

Within this first section, I seek to clarify the historical dimension of work and to examine its ethos under modern conditions, for this provides the opportunity to initiate and support a social process of self-understanding concerning the division and distribution of labor. There is much to be said for the necessity of newly evaluating the economic and social productivity of the distinctive spheres of human activity.[5] This applies above all to the sphere of so-called family work, but also to the sorts of professional work, frequently performed by women, related to care. We must respond to these issues in new ways, most notably by examining what should rightly be considered socially necessary work, what importance such jobs ought to have within the context of individuals' ways of life, and what sort of agreement can be established within an ensuing *ethos of work* regarding the conceptions of reciprocity and justice (Ulrich 1997). To be sure, the binding validity of the answers we develop within such an examination is first and foremost a matter for political consideration. But, importantly, to the extent that there is a specific need here for a theoretical orientation, the topic of work must also be discussed more urgently at the level of social and legal philosophy; it cannot be left to the disciplines of sociology, economics, and political science alone. And beyond these fundamental issues I see here a pressing need to draw on contemporary social philosophy—including feminist philosophy.

The pursuit of this task consists of three distinct subtasks.

The conceptual-theoretical task. What exactly is work? In law and economics, as well as within particular disciplines in the social sciences and in cultural studies, the category of work has very different connotations. Philosophy should be employed to clarify these connotations. It should, however, examine not only the technical usage of the category but also the array of its political and everyday linguistic uses. It should therefore contribute—in an ontological, an anthropological, and a practice-theoretical (*praxistheoretisch*) sense—to an account of why we reserve the title of work for some activities but not others. This undertaking also entails clarifying the criteria underlying the distinction between economically gainful and nongainful employment.

The practice- and action-theoretical task. What is the relevance of work within the spectrum of human activity? Can it be considered—at least under certain circumstances—to be a particularly important and worthwhile form of activity that makes human life meaningful? Or, taking the perspective of women into account, should we instead be satisfied if a highly automated society enables us to rid ourselves of the need to work? Is work only one variable of social self-understanding or is it instead a basic constant within both the process of socialization and the human relationship to nature? Taking these questions as

a backdrop, the Hegelian thesis of the fundamentality of work for human life requires examination, as does the early Marxian postulate of work as an anthropological universal (including the cultural invariance of its significance for the self-development of humankind in the course of history) (Müller 1992/1994). Yet, whether work forms a crucial element of human activities or whether it is justifiable, on grounds of a cultural comparison or under the conditions of late modernity, to follow Hannah Arendt in assigning it a marginal position, is a genuine philosophical question. It is readily apparent that an answer to this question presupposes the considerations developed at the conceptual-theoretical level (a), for a narrowly Eurocentric or androcentric conception would ignore the character of work exhibited within certain activities in so-called primitive cultures. The necessity for drawing on other disciplines—including, in this case, cultural anthropology and ethnology—therefore becomes abundantly clear. After all, the relationship of work to socialization and personal identity is among the classical topics of sociology (Baethge 1992). This is not in the least to deny, however, that practical philosophy and philosophical anthropology should be given a central role here, especially when specifying the place of work in the landscape of human activity and the criteria for determining the social and individual significance of work.

The moral-philosophical task. Should all human beings be able to work if they like? And how can it be ensured that they work under just conditions? There is a theoretical as well as a practical side to this question. The theoretical side becomes evident in the consideration of what relevance work has for a good life, but also in the consideration of the preconditions required for it to have any relevance at all. Even today, a wide variety of forms of work—the child knotting carpets for ten hours a day, the mother in a poverty-stricken family performing a double workload, the grafter whose work consists entirely of the monotonous repetition of a few mechanical movements—has very little to do with what could be considered a good life. Far from offering any perspective on the development of one's identity, to say nothing of one's happiness, working under these conditions also destroys the possibilities for such persons to be able to lead a good life in the future. For as soon as we begin to examine the conditions under which work can rightly be considered to be an element of a good life, we also ask the practical question as to how a society must be organized so that the clearly negative aspects of work (exploitation, damage to health, monotonousness, and lack of meaning) can be reduced as far as possible by technical and social innovation, and how the inevitable negative remainders can be justly distributed among the members of society.

Yet, the claim that work in and of itself represents a good for human life and directly or indirectly satisfies important needs is not easy to substantiate without further explanation. This can be done only if we succeed in proving that a good life is indeed realizable by shaping the activities associated with work to

conform to goods that belong *prima facie* to such a life—such as, for instance, moral and material autonomy, social recognition, the pursuit of individual goals through cooperation with others, the realization of personal desires, and the development of one's own physical and mental capabilities. To date, however, these goods hold only for a small portion of occupations. To acquire them, most human beings are dependent upon sources outside of their work and means of compensation. Even in so-called welfare societies, many members are often denied even the minimal means of attaining these goods.

We can, however, envision the conditions under which work can contribute to the organization of a good life and thus at the same time critically assess the connection between living a good life and the social and economic order. These tasks can be done in tandem because the social and economic order is an absolutely crucial factor for attaining *prima facie* goods in and through work, in that it may either strengthen or neutralize other factors, such as personal effort and the availability of micro-social resources. How, given the social division of labor in modern societies, are the means of access to formal work to be justly regulated? What goods ought actually to be sought if a social right to work is to be justified? And how are existing, frequently gender-related, inequalities of economic and social recognition, meaningful vocational activities, individual flexibility, and autonomy within the sphere of gainful employment—in short, the different gradients of "liberation by and through work"—to be assessed, eliminated, or (if need be) justified? (Sen 1992).

The critical function of philosophy in general and feminist philosophy in particular becomes especially evident in the moral-philosophical task involved in examining the concept of work. For by answering the specified questions, we at the same time develop a yardstick by which to evaluate modern labor societies according to theoretical standards of justice. This implies a critique of current labor relations, first, in that they do not provide remuneration appropriate to the worth of the work undertaken (that is, they exhibit exploitative tendencies in the sense of failing to promote economic reciprocity), and secondly, in that they are heteronomous (that is, they prevent the development of personal autonomy and the realization of individual potential through work). Both problems obviously concern women in a special way.

Liberal theories of justice frequently evade the standards set by these criticisms. They give the impression that the minimal requirements of justice are sufficiently met if formal liberties are not violated and if within the public sphere, outside the bounds of the world of private enterprise, civic engagement and participation are not obstructed. At most, liberal theorists commit themselves to the idea that in a just society the state must intervene through economic and political-economic measures to ensure that those who are worst off are not disadvantaged even further. John Rawls, for example, supplements his well-known difference principle in *A Theory of Justice* with the vague claim

(most assuredly invoking Marx's "realm of freedom") that in a well-ordered society "no one need be servilely dependent on another and made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility. Each can be offered a variety of tasks so that the different elements of his nature find a suitable expression." In such a society it would therefore become possible to overcome the negative aspects of the division of labor "within a just social union of social unions in which all can freely participate as they so incline" (1971, 529).

How, by comparison, has the theme of work thus far been construed within the wider scope of philosophy? A look back through the history of ideas reveals that the philosophical tradition is dominated by two currents of thought in this regard. The first has developed out of philosophical anthropology and political economy, both of which take their departure from Hegel and Marx. According to this current of thought, work is primarily assessed in terms of social relations and individual achievement from within the purview of *human-historical progress* and *human self-realization*. The second current, relatively separate from the first, arises out of the existential-philosophical and phenomenological traditions, according to which the category of work refers first and foremost to a project undertaken in the service of *individual cultivation* and *self-perfection*. Thus the concept, as used in the first current of thought, is focused on formal, abstract, and economically productive work. In the second current, by contrast, it is aimed at concrete, individually productive work: this being understood (as, for instance, by Kierkegaard [1987, 283] and Herbert Marcuse [1973]) in terms of ethical worth or personal vocation and existential self-realization. Yet, problematically, within both currents of thought, gender-specific aspects of work are considered only cursorily, if at all.

This being the case, integrating these two different yet indispensable perspectives, or at least connecting them, becomes a central task for ethical research directed toward modern social and economic issues, as well as a desideratum for current modes of social philosophy and anthropology. From within the field of philosophy more generally, elements for such research have been developed within both theories of action arising from the Aristotelian tradition and from discourse-theoretical considerations regarding the *telos* of human activity—in particular those offered by Hannah Arendt (1958) and Jürgen Habermas (1971). Yet, as is characteristic in the post-Marxist era, in the case of both thinkers the category of work generally continues to remain underdetermined and committed to the production paradigm. Naturalizing and neutralizing it in a manner that is similar, incidentally, to Scheler and Durkheim, Arendt regards work as presocial and inferior within the matrix of human practice, which enables her to provide a richer contrast for the opposing idea of action as the intellectual-political *telos* of all human activity.[6] And Habermas's disjunction between work (instrumental action) and interaction

(communicative action) proves to be functionally underdetermined and thereby a dead end, as both Honneth (1995b) and Giddens (1986) have clearly revealed. In turn, practice-oriented philosophical positions like those of Agnes Heller (1984) and Jóhann P. Àrnason (1988), which take a rather one-sided view of the Marxist tradition and generally interpret human activity in accordance with the production paradigm, proceed at their own peril.[7]

All these views, however, share the basic assumption that work within the traditional domestic and familial spheres of female activity is neither socially relevant nor a possible mode of self-realization: an assumption that has long been interrogated within feminist theory. These views simply perpetuate the duly dehistoricized and depoliticized Aristotelian concept of the *oikos*.

In response to the fact that the classical demand from within the women's movement for "wages for housework" has brought only limited results, feminist philosophers have provided a fundamental critique of the Marxist concept of reproduction. As the work of Alison M. Jaggar and William L. McBride (1985) and Virginia Held (1990) clearly reveals, this critique aims at rejecting the very concept of reproduction for two basic reasons. First, it is inscribed into the dichotomous difference between nature and culture, which is itself already gendered: according to Marx, the sphere of reproductive work appears as a naturally unfolding interaction with human and nonhuman nature and is therefore not regarded as a historical process. At the same time, the sphere of production is treated as a cultural achievement, as the authentic setting for the self-realization of the human species, and thus valued and valorized as the very engine for human history.

Second, as feminist philosophers argue, the concept of reproduction is merely derivative. The Marxist tradition defines it in opposition not only to rural and artisan production but above all to industrial work, which provides the decisive model of production. Regarding the concept of reproduction, Held in particular criticizes the contrast Marx sets up between production and mere repetitive human activity, the latter being devoid of creative elements and amounting to nothing more than "copying, producing more of the same" (1990, 108). But while the Marxist concept of reproduction at least makes explicit its relation to the traditional female activities of housework and the bearing and rearing of children, this relation is only implicit in Arendt's category of work (although construed in a strikingly similar way to the notion of reproduction).

This sort of critique of the conventional biological and economic models of reproduction is not, however, sufficient if we are to achieve a better cultural and social understanding of family work and a transformation of the current concept of work in general. Such a transformation requires, moreover, a reconceptualization of the socially valid concept of work—one that takes account not only of the problems that arise from unemployment but that is also suited to make visible as work "procreative" activities in both the phenomenological

and the political-economic sense. The concept must likewise provide a way of classifying both the lack of compensation and the lack of social recognition of private care-related activities as nothing short of exploitation (Krebs 1996; Pauer-Studer 1996).

The Problematic Underdetermination of the Ethical-Moral Dimension of Work in Philosophical Discourse

In this second section of my essay, I would like to show not only that the ethical and historical dimensions of traditionally female work have remained underdetermined within the context of classical theories and philosophies of work, but that this is likewise the case with regard to human work generally. As a consequence, the marginalization of traditionally female fields of work continues: both as a "private" welfare service for children, the disabled, and the elderly, and as a "public" activity restricted to the professional care sector. To substantiate this claim, however, it would perhaps be best to further elaborate on this issue.

In the course of the technological revolution, the highly developed division of labor in organized democratic and capitalistic societies increasingly individualizes the responsibility for achieving success in work (note, for example, the discussions by Ulrich Beck and Richard Sennett, among others, of flexible work hours, temp work, and working from home). At the same time, the traditional mechanisms for the development and maintenance of standards of justice regarding formal work are diminishing in strength (due in large part to outsourcing and redistribution of labor to Third World countries, deregulation, exploitation of the various state initiatives to create jobs, and evasion of tariffs). And with both the ongoing privatization of the socially necessary segments of family and welfare-related work and the increasing tendency toward asymmetrical accumulation of property and capital, stiff competition has emerged among those in society who are fit to work. Such competition is visible in the pursuit of employment generally, but it is most acute with regard to jobs that provide not merely the opportunity for prestige and status but that also frequently, though not always, promise good pay and anywhere from some to a high degree of self-realization in the existential-philosophical sense. Such jobs also offer the prospect of temporal, economic, and institutional autonomy, and at least a partial reconciliation (in the professional realm) of expressiveness and instrumentality.

To the extent that democratic and capitalistic societies have, under the aegis of globalization, succeeded in fostering neither a quantitatively or qualitatively just distribution of formal work nor the systematic integration of informal work, their political systems are increasingly exposed to a crisis of legitimation. In spite of the frequent proclamations that we have reached the end of labor societies,

the exclusion of large portions of the world's population from access to formal work (this being the quantitative problem of distribution) constitutes, in the eyes of many people, an even more serious injustice than the asymmetry in educational opportunities for self-development through work (the qualitative problem of distribution).

This evaluation is not based solely upon the fact that those affected by these economic conditions are entirely or partially stripped of the capacity for self-determination—a problem that can partly be rectified through the employment of various welfare measures and a work-independent basic income, as well as through reformation of the welfare system.[8] Rather, this evaluation takes into account another substantive dimension of human existence on which continued unemployment has a negative effect: the desire, in everyday speech, to "be useful" to others, to contribute in a cooperative or creative way to community endeavors. To account for the desire to share in the socioeconomic exchange of services by considering only the norms and conventions of modern labor societies seems to me to be anthropologically underdetermined (Schlothfeldt 2000, 374).

From Catholic social theory and some traditional strands of the classical labor movement, the idea has been generated that a dignified life entails working for the good of other human beings or for the functional coherence of society. The idea of self-realization, by contrast, not only takes a back seat to experiencing meaningful activity but is also functionally tied to social concerns. Consequently, the meaningfulness of an activity does not come primarily from viewing it in terms of income opportunities that exceed mere subsistence (including the pursuit of rational self-interest). Rather, an activity is designated as meaningful to the extent that it applies in a positive and intentional way to the concerns, desires, and interests of others—and thereby neither to trans-subjective market mechanisms such as the "invisible hand" (Adam Smith) nor to Hegel's so-called "system of needs," as delineated in *Elements of a Philosophy of Right* (1991, 227–39).

The classical concepts of alienation, divestiture, and objectification require reformulation against this background, and along similar lines, it would be worthwhile to examine in what respect Marx's emphasis of the ideal of "human production" (namely, that the satisfaction of the needs of others becomes a need of my own) can be detached from the production paradigm. Within both care ethics and the debates surrounding gender justice, significant advances in this regard have already been made.[9]

It quickly becomes evident, however, that the question concerning how and under what conditions care-related activities are to be regarded as work is scarcely discussed in this literature. Indeed, care is generally recognized as a designation of neither merely a feeling, such as empathetic participation, nor a specific attitude of moral attentiveness, receptivity, and responsiveness. Rather,

it is a complex of different types of action (doing, refraining, speaking, listening) brought together in a mode of practice understood in relation to and as being for others. On my reading, the prevailing consensus among care ethicists is that care-related activities are regarded as meaningful so long as they meet the principal criterion that the person being addressed is unable to satisfy her or his own needs. The reasons given for this sort of dependency generally draw on basic conditions of human existence: childhood, illness, and the needs of the elderly. Yet, such dependency can arise from particular physical and emotional conditions as well: disability or shock arising from the loss of a loved one, or (and here I amplify Diemut E. Bubeck's point) sex-specific conditions, such as the sort of dependency that arises due to pregnancy, birth, and the early stages of child rearing (1995, 137ff). To be considered as well are societal and socially generated conditions of dependency.

According to Bubeck, dependency marks a decisive difference to service that can be performed—as is the case with care-related activities—professionally as well as semi- or nonprofessionally. Her thesis that "care is work" is, however, only partially substantiated. It can be pointed out, phenomenologically, that care, like most activities recognized as work, is obviously arduous and that it exhibits an obligatory character. Yet, while this character is imparted to care by the concretely experienced needs of others, evident in face-to face situations, Bubeck presents the necessity of work in abstract terms, as being imparted through institutions. This comparison makes clear, however, that within her discussion of the concept of work she intermingles empirical and occupational elements with the concept itself. Perhaps just as crucial is that services are organized and shaped by the demands of the market and thereby can be performed independently of whether the affected person could satisfy her or his relevant needs without assistance. Yet the parameters here are quite fluid: if all individuals had to dispatch their own mail, draw their own water, or produce their own electricity, there would not be the slightest possibility of maintaining an efficient and expedient social division of labor. More persons would struggle, and would be fully absorbed in the struggle, to achieve basic subsistence; this in turn would make them even more dependent upon others for care. It therefore seems eminently important, on my view, to emphasize not only the ethical character of care-related activities—be they currently performed in either the private or public sector—but also of human work generally. For to shift the ethical character of human work to the foreground entails the revaluation and recognition of traditionally female spheres of practice in both the public and private sectors. This will become clearer in the following section.

Socially Necessary Work as a Privileged Mode of Human Activity

In this third section, I will defend the thesis that socially necessary work can be rightfully understood as a privileged mode of human activity. This argument integrates the considerations that have been developed in previous sections. I would like to specify it as follows: socially necessary work—usually understood as economically and socially acknowledged work—is indeed not the only nor even the most decisive paradigm for understanding human practice. But it is the only form of human activity that allows three important moral motives for human practice to be brought together and examined at a structural level: (1) the need for self-preservation through individual effort (the motive of autonomy and independent economic security of one's life); (2) the desire for social recognition in a reasonably cooperative relationship with others (the motive of self-realization through socialization); and (3) the aspiration, in the ethical sense, to be actively useful to others (the motive of ethical divestiture or exertion in service of the needs of others).

Each of these morally quite different motives makes human work susceptible to humiliation and exploitation. And in modern societies typified by a division of labor, none of them can be regarded as isolated from the others, even if the individual motivation to work (arising primarily from personal or economic reasons) highlights only one of them. Traditionally female activities that take place primarily in the private sector (so-called informal care) have characteristically failed to be considered in terms of the first two motives; they have engendered neither economic independence nor social recognition. But it is exactly these two motives that have up to now been directly at the center of the philosophical concept of work: each of them is considered to be an appropriate criterion for whether an activity—whether performed formally or informally—is actually regarded as work. Family work is not validated as work according to this criterion insofar as its social character, its function with regard to the socio-economic exchange of services, is not made evident. This "shading" is primarily due to the terminological convolution of family work with individual forms of "personal work" and care-related forms of employment (as they result from the sexual division of labor) (Kambartel 1993; Krebs 2000, 173). What needs to be established here is a more precise specification and economic evaluation of family work as well as a bolstering and mediation of the third (ethical) motive as an important and crucial criterion for the definition of work. This would also serve to contest certain attempts found in the tradition of discourse ethics; it makes little sense that activities—which "on the basis of special obligations are directed toward specific persons" instead of providing for an "open sphere of receivership"—are to be excluded straightaway from the concept of socially necessary work (Schlothfeldt 2000, 381).

If the integrated understanding of the ethos of work I here support is indeed plausible, what conclusions are to be drawn with regard to the social sphere? To respond to such a question, I return to the topic of a right to work. Kambartel and Margalit (among others) have argued that the failure not only to realize a right to work but also to acknowledge one's work due to exclusion from the socioeconomic exchange of services can do lasting damage to individuals' self-respect and amounts to nothing less than a failure to realize a right to social affiliation (Gorz 1989; Kambartel 1993 and 1996; Krebs 1996 and 1999).

This is made worse insofar as, to a great extent, the failure to acknowledge work in fact implies the failure to realize a right to affiliation in modern labor societies—which entails, upon further analysis, that the structural dearth of chances for public recognition (and this means economic recognition) of one's labor within the productive as well as the so-called reproductive sectors leads to an unjustifiable degradation of those affected even if a sufficient degree of welfare is secured. Kambartel mentions the right of each member of society "to not owe one's own life to the achievement (the 'sacrifice') of *others*"; this, in turn, corresponds to being freed from the obligation "to subject oneself to the social force underlying the willingness to sacrifice." The right to work includes the legitimate moral requirement to be recognized as an "(equal) member of a mutually supportive society" (Kambartel 1993, 245). In developed societies—in general, those established through work—this requirement is mainly to be fulfilled through participation in socially necessary work itself.

To better understand the claim that persons must maintain a legally embodied fundamental right to work (internationally as well as nationally), the principle of *distributive justice,* derived both from the tradition of natural law and that of civil liberties, and oriented according to the concept of property ownership (Köhler 1999), should be supplemented by means of the ethical-legal principle of *participatory justice.* Human beings should have the right to carry out their ethical obligation to partake in useful and necessary cooperation in the sphere of socially organized communities, provided that this is a component of their perceived identity. Yet such a plea for the right to work, defended so differently by diverse thinkers, still does not entail an argument for full employment—for an increasing congruence between the number of gainfully employable persons and full-time jobs. Rather, participatory justice also can be realized through an increase in part-time jobs, the implementation of greater flexibility between gainful employment and (paid) family work for both sexes (the key term here being gender justice), and the institutional promotion of volunteer organizations or various forms of self-organized initiatives.

Such a justification of the right to participate in economic and social forms of cooperation is not exhausted, however, merely by emphasizing an individual's right to particular kinds of social recognition and civic integration; neither is

it reducible, as Margalit assumes, to individual conceptions, completely independent of ethical and social criteria, of what constitutes an appropriate and meaningful occupation (1996, 248ff).

In light of all this, I would like to suggest that the category of 'meaningful activities' in modern societies cannot be discussed independently of the integrative aspect of work. Yet it goes without saying that such a determination of the meaning of human practice requires more comprehensive reflection. For the meaningfulness of human practice is certainly not limited only to those activities that serve self-preservation, make cooperation possible, provide for social and societal recognition, or involve an ethical divestiture with regard to the needs of others.

But the intuition that individuals' dignity and self-respect cannot be determined apart from the practical, work-generated connection to the interests and needs of other human beings (Sennet 1998, 98ff) should not be lightly dismissed, and it certainly does not come down to favoring a "productivist narrowing" of the concept of human identity (Honneth 1995a, 13). What is at stake is to rethink the connection between work and justice against the backdrop of the questions only raised here. It is thereby crucial, along with examining the practical-theoretical perspective, to consider moral, legal, and practical-philosophical perspectives as well. In my judgment, priority must be assigned specifically to the task of clarifying how the relationship of the (individual) capacity for meaning and the (social) necessity of work-related activities is constituted in modern societies, and under which theoretical premises its emancipatory implications are to be developed.

Notes

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1. I begin this essay by bringing together several formulations with which I ended "Drei philosophische Argumente für ein Recht auf Arbeit" (see Gürtler 2000). My central concern is thereby to push these considerations further.

2. See the compelling overview of this issue by Werner Conze (1979).

3. The Marxist concept of 'production paradigm' considers socially organized work to be the decisive basis for historical and anthropological development and tends to reduce work to a material exchange with nature (*Stoffwechsel mit der Natur*).

4. The German term *Lebensmittel* literally means "means to life."

5. The political scientist Eva Senghaas-Knobloch (1999) coins the key term *social activity* for this new assessment.

6. The critical potential of this perspective is elucidated by Claudia Lenz (2000).
7. See also Axel Honneth's synopsis (1995a) as well as Hans Joas (1996).
8. See Van Parijs (1995) and for a criticism, Kersting (2000a).
9. See Okin (1989), Fraser (1994), and Bubeck (1995). An overview of these various essays is provided by Card (1991); compare all of the above to Conradi (2001).

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