

IKECHUKWU S. UGWU*

The Analysis of Value-Free or Value-Ladeness of Work in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching of John Paul II

The present approach and understanding of work especially in the Western society has been characterised with such ideologies like: consumerism, imperialism, total desire for wealth or gain, capitalism which negates the universal common good and absolute good of the person; thereby separates work from its absolute nature, motive and objective value. Good, especially the good of the person, subordinated to common/absolute/greatest good¹ has been the right purpose of act and fundamental basis of human relation. Hence, we understand from Karol Wojtyła that human act (work as the object of our focus) carries within itself an expressive absolute value that describes the goodness that belongs to the person as somebody, different from the good that we find in object.

However, the contemporary approach to work in the present Western society described above, could be compared to the lived experience of two to three decades ago. A similar situation in the present time described by David Weil as ‘Fissured’. Because of the transformation experienced in the work-placed, where the relationship between the employer and worker has been marred by pure desire for wealth and gain. This fissured attitude has negative impact and consequence on workers, their families and health, together with a decline in the welfare and status of workers and work². This modern approach to work gave rise to the intervention by John Paul II in the reflection, ‘*Laborem Exer-*

* Ikechukwu S. Ugwu – The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5548-5880>; e-mail: ugwusteviyke@gmail.com

¹ In his response, Socrates said: ‘it is the greatest good for man that he should speak daily of virtue (*value*), and that he should investigate the sublime matters connected with virtue (*value*), both for himself and with his disciples. Without such occupations, life would be unworthy of man... some goods are less conducive to happiness, others more’. Quoted in: K. Wojtyła, *The Lublin Lectures*, trans. H. McDonald, Lublin 2020, p. 144-145.

² D. Weil, *The Fissured Workplace and its Consequences*, in: *The Fissured Workplace*, 2014, p. 7-27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.cttowppdw.4> (access: 20.03.2023).



cens'. And so, given the reduced understanding of work with its negative effects on the meaning of human person, typical of the 'Fissured' work-place, it is relevant in this time to challenge the exclusion of the absolute value of work that portrays the objective good of the person, a value that is subordinated to the value of human person who is the subject of work. Relying on the Social Reflections of John Paul II about work, because of his personal experience as a worker, and for the fact that he objectively studied and critically analysed the problem from its root, and so, proffers truthful and unbiased solution. Indeed, true value of work that leads to total development and determination does not only rest on economic gain or pure desire for wealth/money typical of the present lived experience, but on profound attitude that man develops towards realization of absolute values³, especially the personalistic value. Therefore, these above-mentioned forms of idolatry of work can be described as morally evil, because they lack proper ethical working principles that do not lead to true development and human determination.

It is evidently clear that values⁴ inheres in things as objects of experience and desire, and as well constitutes the motivating force of act. When we genuinely experience values in our acts, we become conscious of the objective goodness of the acts of value, which cannot be reduced to any category of mere natural world, or just object of mere satisfaction. For we know that at the very base of the act that truly defines the person, there lies this fundamental value, which human being experiences immediately in their act namely, the value of the person, similarly, other values which are lower in hierarchy follow, as object of experience.

However, there are various categorization of values in the contemporary debate in a certain hierarchical order-higher and lower values. But the classification proposed by Max Scheler⁵, articulates the various human needs which they experience in their daily activities. In the various experiences of values,

³ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 37-38.

⁴ Value objectively understood refers to the ontic and empirical contents of human actions (work as [human act and object of consideration in this discussion] a unique structure of human praxis that constitutes culture, develops the person and human society). It is at the root of every human action. Value is what the person experiences and what motivates the person to act in a particular manner, and so, realize their being as moral being. This fundamental truth and good which lies hidden in every human action(work), defines and actualizes the human personhood. Nonetheless, since modern time the meaning of value has assumed a different understanding, expressed in Kantian transcendental philosophy, constituted by moral duty or pure cognitive constitution. However, the content constitution of value was restored to human experience through the material-value ethicists, especially the non-formal ethics of Marx Scheler, von Hildebrand, Edit Stein, and improved upon by Karol Wojtyła. Thus, value(s) now refers to norm(s) in the praxiological conception of human action. This suggests that value is linked to human person as the subject and object of acts, and human person is the special and highest of all values.

⁵ M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. M. S. Frings, R. L. Funk, Evanston-Illinois 1973.

human person always realizes the good. It is not just the individual good, but also the absolute/greatest good to which the person is affiliated and through which they get to their final goal and good, God⁶. Nevertheless, despite the consciousness of this good, it is the experience of value as that ontic structure of act(work) that draws the person to action. And so, exchanging the desire for the ontic value of work with other secondary/lower values like total desire for the value of wealth/gain, subdues human purpose, and solution to this problem is what concerns this research.

Work consists of all human activities. And the ontic character of work as a divine mandate (to conquer and subdue the earth) and natural obligation refer to it as means of integral human development and actualization, and so, categorizes work as essentially possessing higher value. For through work, human person complements nature, contributes to the building and developing of the human society and world. This understanding of work differentiates human work from the work of other creatures. Thus, John Paul II uniquely expresses that: “work is for humankind; humankind is not for work. Because work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – it is through work that man not only transforms nature, adapting to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes more a human being”⁷. It implies that, while realizing the divine mandate and natural obligation, man desires work, because he is aware of the ontic character of the value of work, which also reflects the inherent dignity and value of the person as subject of work. He also understands that he can truly acquire this value only by engaging in meaningful work. Work is thus seen as object of desire, given the ontic character of value that inheres in work.

However, the paradigm shift in the approach to human work as a result of advancement in the scientific and technological innovation, as well as the pure a priori understanding of the person, have ascribed a new meaning, purpose and value of work. A meaning characterised by the principle of ‘use/utile’, with a materialistic understanding and instrumentalization of the person. This approach opposes the structure of the fundamental human nature, founded on moral theory; and the understanding that human being must be treated always as an end and never as means to any (utilitarian) end. A principle that constitutes the foundation of United Nations promulgation on human rights, which Wojtyła adopted in his analysis of work and the person as subject of work. Again, this new approach expresses priority of capital/money or economic value (a lower value of work) over human value. It also manifests lived experiences of various form of exploitations, economic and social oppression of human labour and suppression of their rights, discriminations, child labour, oppression of women, poor remuneration based on racial variation. Thus, value of

⁶ K. Wojtyła, *Ethics Primer*, trans. H. McDonald, Lublin 2017, p. 14.

⁷ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 6.

work is construed as depending on the agreeableness of individuals, in the ideal of capitalism⁸, as well as being determined purely by the owner(s) of labour, majorly with capitalist/utilitarian mentality. Similarly, some workers prioritise the economic value or money over the value and inalienable dignity of the person. Consequently, work has become a free commodity in the market that is determined by capital and monetary gain, which does not take into account the good of the person and dignity that inherently belongs to the person. Thus, the ideal of absolute freedom in determination of work is sensed in this approach. And so, the dilemma whether human work is value-free or value-laden in realizing the natural purpose of work that gears towards human fulfilment and self-determination.

Given this dilemma, I will discuss in this paper, first the metaphysical structure of work in relation to human person who is the subject of work. On the basis of this, I will present how the principle of modernity in the ideal of autonomous rational enterprise has influenced the contemporary approach to work, in the ideal of value-free work pursuit. An approach that undermines the obligation to engage in meaningful work imposed by nature, as well as a divine mandate; as such, portrays a materialistic understanding of the person, in their pursuit for total desire for wealth and economic value as the sole purpose of work. Aligning with the thought of John Paul II Social reflection, I will present the ideal of value-ladenness of work presupposing from the ontic structure of work as the proper/right approach to work, which actualizes the value of person, as well as gear towards human fulfilment and self-determination.

Human person and work

Work is basically understood as, a collection of all human activities, both intellectual, mechanical and manual/physical, in various circumstances of human life and nature. These activities contain ontic and empirical worths/values, which vary according to human needs and goals. It is also construed as a medium of achieving the essential motive and worth of human nature, namely, realizing the truth of the person, a value that one experiences immediately at a meaningful and honest work. Besides this end, work also achieves a lesser goal, namely, economic value which helps and guides the person in their duty as a responsible builder of earthly society⁹. Through meaningful work Wojtyła

⁸ I refer to Max Weber's understanding of capitalism in this study, given that his understanding and the new approach to work squares with the Catholic Social Teachings, especially John Paul II reflection and reproach to capitalist ideology, for its negative influence and damaging effects on human personhood. Capitalism according to Weber is an economic system based not on custom or tradition, but on the deliberate and systematic adjustment of economic means to the settlement of the objective 'Pecuniary Profit'. The system, he maintains, will continue to shackle human life until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 1992, p. 9, 103.

⁹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Intro.

states, man defines and re-creates himself, and this places him in a superior position among other beings of nature. For who the person is primarily drives from within his being, and other externalizations like his work have their source and cause from within¹⁰. He further maintains that, only human work bears the mark of humanity, that is, the imprint of the person who works within a community of persons, and this demonstrates works' interior characteristics, that is a way constitutes its very nature¹¹.

As an essential defining feature of the person, work is a necessary phenomenon and an obligation imposed by nature for human preservation, continuity and means of providing human needs. Man through work explores and continually advances nature's resources for their good, as well as procures what is needed for their daily living, and what is their naturally required right to live, elevating ceaselessly the cultural and moral level of human society. Thus, we understand that there exists a relation between human work and nature's resources, because through human work, the value of these resources is realized. A value that crystalizes into civilization, while distinguishing human work from the work of other creature, since, human work possesses a character of interiority, given the faculties of intellect and free will.

Indeed, by this interior determination of work, we grasp the spiritual nature of human being, who as a rational being engages in work that bear their imprint; as well as the understanding of human being both as *homo faber*-working man and as *homo sapiens*-rational man (being), given that he engages in a thoughtful work. For man's definition of himself in and through his work, makes him really present in his integrity, and contains a certain imprint which he leaves in his work, and as well portrays his reality¹². Thus, work as a human phenomenon reveals the truth, beauty and goodness of the person. And this truth must be recognized as such, because it relates to the dignity which is an inherent quality of the person who works. Given that through meaningful human work freely undertaken, we grasp the interior dimension of the person as it manifests externally through work, thereby reveals the humanity of the person¹³. Again, the interior character of work reveals the spiritual worth of work which also appeals to the good of the person, that is, personal good that is subordinated to the objective good. And so, Wojtyła affirms that, the spiritual character of work reveals man's moral value, as well as describes work as possessing moral value, which is what man experiences at work, an experience that constitutes his perfection and determination¹⁴.

¹⁰ K. Wojtyła, *On the Dignity of the Human Person*, in: *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. T. Sandok, New York, p. 178.

¹¹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, Intro.

¹² K. Wojtyła, *The Intentional Act and Human Act, that is, Act and Experience*, "Analecta Husserliana" 1974, vol. 5, p. 270.

¹³ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, Intro.

¹⁴ K. Wojtyła, *Ethics Primer*, p. 149.

Since work tends towards realizing the objective goodness of man, work is then said to possess epistemic value¹⁵, because it is linked to the moral order of the person. This therefore demonstrates that it is only human work that gives meaning to his being and being of other creatures. It also reveals the two-fold phenomena of work as something personal and necessary. Work is a personal reality, inasmuch as the energy and abilities expended are freely bound up with the working person, and it is the exclusive property of the person who works. It is necessary, if it is governed by the grave obligation of every individual to ensure preservation of life¹⁶. Work is thus understood as a vocation and prerequisite of every person, through which we express and fulfil ourselves.

Given that work perfects the person and gear towards realization of the good of the world, therefore, the basis of determining the worth/content of work is not primarily the kind of work done. Rather, it is in fact, the understanding that it the person in their spirit, will and intellect that works, and this informs the subjectivity of the person whose perfection is sort in the work. In his work, man understands that he is subject-agent of work, the starting point and end, he also understands that his position is of essential importance in realizing all human enterprises in the principle of existence. Since the worth of work lies on the person, it follows that the person is the fundamental and at the centre of values, especially work, all other human products possess only secondary worth. Hence, Wojtyła argues that, there is a value that lies as the strictly personal content of action, for at every performance of action by the person, there lies a fundamental value. He calls this value, ‘personalistic value or the value of the person’¹⁷. Work as an essential defining part of the person, obtains its relevance and essence from the person who works, and who determine himself in and through the meaningful work.

Besides the two-fold character of work, it also possesses two dimensions, subjective and objective. The subjective sphere of work refers to the subjectivity of the individual person as a moral being, who freely engages in a thoughtfully planned work. This dimension defines the person as a subject of work, who in their work is always an end and not a means or instrument of work. This attests to the epistemic value that constitutes work. As subject of work, human being freely and consciously decides about work conditions that befits human transcendent dignity. Thus, we grasp through work, the value of the

¹⁵ Epistemic values are values that are epistemic in virtue of their relationship to the truth. They are also called alethic values (from the Greek *alētheia*-truth). The Greek word *episteme* means knowledge or insight, and of course, knowledge and insight imply standing in the right sort of relationship to truth. Epistemic value is distinguished from other kinds of values, like aesthetic, social, political values etc. See: R. Peels, *Epistemic Values in the Humanities and in the Sciences*, “History of Humanities” 3(2018)1, p. 89-111. This theory affirms the concept of ethical imperative and norm, which is considered as the principle of necessary moral code, that motivates a person to act accordingly.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 6, 8.

¹⁷ K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. G. Ignatik, Washington 2021, p. 320.

subject who works as it reflects through the value of work, since work is naturally designed for the person. Wherefore, the objective dimension of work emphasis on the object and instrument of work, both the mechanized equipment and means of production, it refers also to the economic activities and values/gains that follow from work. Therefore, the products and resources from human work both intellectual and manual constitute the objective dimension of work. This dimension must integrate with the subjective dimension so as to realize the fundamental purpose of work, and actualize the person who is the subject of work.

Furthermore, the advancement of mechanization through modern science and technological innovation has improved and revolutionized the structure of work, shifting emphasis from the subjective dimension of work to the objective dimension. Realizing this later purpose of work entails harsh economic initiatives that demonstrates demeaning or dishonourable conditions for human work without regards to the inherent dignity, and without regard to what is the objective content of the work in question¹⁸. As such, one cannot but ask, whether human being is at liberty to engage in any kind of work (sex work, eugenic human experimentation) regardless of human valuelessness that character such work. Hence, work previously understood as naturally designed for the person, has now been assumed a new meaning, where the person is meant for work, by technologizing work and objectivizing the subject of work. Supposing a new meaning and character for work, which is purely for economic gain and realization of wealth. A situation that creates tension of class struggle and division between owners of means of production and workers who are regarded as material forces. Reacting to this situation, Wojtyła states that: “technology has ceased to be man’s ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work supplants him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of the precious employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to status of its slaves”¹⁹. By ordering the motive of work from goodness to self-love and self-interest, the person as subject of work is caught up in the new approach to work, and exposed to threats. Threats that manifest in the work conditions, and living standard in the value judgement, that opposes the value of person, in their beliefs and norms. This new approach as it is founded on rational autonomy, construes the essence of work to be value-free, as it seeks only the realization of economic gain, personal value agreeableness and personal interest. Thus, I ask, what then constitutes the ideal of value-free work?

¹⁸ B. Leahy, *Believe in Love: The Life, Ministry and Teachings of John Paul II*, New York 2011, p. 129.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 6.

Value-free work

The discussion of value-free work affirms the debate about value-free science, understanding science as work (intellectual work), where scientists, some form of work, and owners/sponsors of scientific investigation and means of production, in realizing their self-interest, self-love and personal knowledge, formulate a value judgement about work or nature of work and work production without regard to epistemic value. In this attitude of self-interest value judgement, work now becomes a pure cognitive act, or what David Weil describes as ‘Fissured’ given the rising income and wealth (property and capital income) disparity, broad income and job insecurity, languishing underemployment, and lagging labour force participation rates²⁰. A materialistic attitude to work which emphasizes wealth and economic value over the value of the person. Based on the modern understanding of absolute freedom²¹ in value determination, especially work, an assumption that is disconnected from truth, i.e., an ontological order, with man’s own being and structure of reality²². A modern understanding that reduces man to working being-homo faber, giving the impression of arbitrariness in value, total freedom of choice work determination, with realization of wealth as the sole end of work. Thus, human person (workers) in this attitude is understood as means to the desired ends of owners of work. Work is no longer seen as medium of human development, subsistence and completion of nature, but as utile, given the total control by employers who determine the value of work.

Value-free constitution of work further supposes that work should be guided by autonomous cognitive value-judgement or realization of the good of wealth, or economic value. Although St. Thomas Aquinas had argued that, there are levels of goodness, but the, absolute goodness is equivalent to objective good or epistemic value which portrays personalistic value, and differs from this goodness/bonum (wealth/economic value), because it lacks *respectum ad aliud*²³. Nevertheless, the ideal of value-free work prefer the goodness

²⁰ D. Weil, *The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for so Many and What Can Be Done to Improve it*, Harvard University Press 2014, quoted in L. Golden, “Social Service Review” 89(2015), no. 3, pp. 568-574, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/683098> (access: 20.03.2023).

²¹ The conception of freedom supposed here is detached from the obedience to the truth and consequently from the duty to respect the rights of others. It consists also in break with the past and desire to mould one’s own life and being according to one’s emotional spontaneity; free from external intervention and exempt from moral evaluation, as well as an expression of seeking self-love which leads to an unbridled affirmation of self-interest without recourse to the common good. See: A. Lekka-Kowalik, *On the Freedom and Limits of Scientific Inquiry*, in: Z. Zdybicka, *Freedom in Contemporary Culture: Acts of the World Congress of Christian Philosophy Catholic University of Lublin, 20-25 August 1996*, Lublin 1998, p. 548; also John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 17.

²² John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 84.

²³ J. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, Washington 1996, p. 177.

of wealth or economic value over the epistemic value. Because the value of work is measured by the output or gain, without recourse to the personalistic value, we experience in work places precarious situations like: opportunism, cutting corners²⁴, and taking advantage are considered virtuous, as long as economic value is achieved. With the value of work and the worker being weighed according to economic gain and output, work and workers in this ideal are considered on the basis of efficiency and optimum production of profit, knowledge acquisition for utile and for sensual gratification like in the case of sex worker, whose goodness is relative to the satisfaction she/he provides.

Given the individual value judgement and value determination by the owners of business and means of production, in the ideal of value-free work, job satisfaction and workers' need are of less importance, and such concept like dignity of worker or human person is regarded as illusory ideology, because the goodness of work is relative to the employers. Expressive of this lived experience in modern work approach to disintegration of families, where husband/wife (father/mother) are separated from each other in pursuit of wealth at the expense of the foundation of human society. Similar understand is portrayed where, human being is treated as object of satisfaction like in the case of sex worker and eugenic practices, for the goodness of the person refers to utilitarian end. In all, what counts is the economic value, while subordinating the ontic quality of the person to material constitution.

Value-free work also affirms that neutrality of value of work is a necessary condition for work determination. This ideal, seems to suppress all forms of bias and cultural/traditional interferences or influences in human work choices as means of realization of human needs. It presupposes that work should be constituted by free economic initiative, which promotes greater scientific achievement, better knowledge, increased productivity, economic gain and maximization of profit. On the basis of this conception, max Weber argues that the prerequisite for objectivity of science and optimum maximization in all areas of human work, is possible only under value-free scientific inquiry and value-free work²⁵. It follows therefore that, the pursuit of economic value, in the ideal of value-free work increases and improves productivity, as well as, guarantee better human society. Hence, it is the personal value of the researcher according to Weber, or the owners of production that determine and influence the purpose of work. This approach to work according John Paul II presents a difficult working condition for workers, who are victims of forced labour and injustice²⁶, and in some situations, impede productivity because of the friction and conflict between workers and employers.

²⁴ R. Kuttner, *Everything for Sale*, Chicago 1996, p. 49.

²⁵ M. Weber, *Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*, in: M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Science*, New York 1949, p. 50-112.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 8.

Other real experiences of ideal of value-free which commodify the person include: child labour, various marginalization and discrimination against women in labour, unjust wages/salaries, poor work environment and safety, tight work schedule, lack of opportunity for growth and advancement. Given these experiences, John Paul II argues that the ideal of value-free with its support of these situations denies the person of what he describes as “the supreme insight concerning the true goodness of the human labour, their transcendence in respect to earthly (material) realities and the contradiction in their hearts between the desire for the fullness of what is good and their own inability to attain it.” It also destroys the beauty of work that directs man to his teleology and the Truth of his finality.

Conversely, the realization of the absolute goodness as what man experiences as the content and goal of work seems difficult to achieve in the ideal of value-free work. Thus, it is important that we consider the thought of value-ladenness of work in realizing this goal for the person and in human actualization of personhood.

Value-ladenness of work

The understanding that the ontic structure of work with its axiological content as the essential key to the social order and human endeavours, which surpasses economic value, eudaimonic value and individual value or personal interest of owners of production and researchers constitute the basis of the ideal of value-ladenness. It states that the value of the person is the highest of all values in the hierarchy of values, and that work possesses transcendent value, which serves as one of the means of realizing the absolute goodness of the person, since the person understands that they experience value as the motive of all human activities and content of acts. This understanding affirms many anthropologists’ understandings that, the world is an embodiment of recognized values. Thus, Dietrich von Hildebrand describes the human society as “the world of values”²⁷. Charles Taylor maintains that our everyday world is not a neutral or value-free reality, for we inevitably experience the world in terms of value in its objective sense. For we live in a moral space instead of neutral space²⁸. In this space, we orient ourselves towards the common good or objective value, which supersedes our personal interests. And so, value as the ontic-empirical object of acts-work, is the primary data of human experience, irreducible to any category of natural order or personal interest.

This ontic value of work objectively experienced either individually or collectively, tends towards the good and wellbeing of the person, not on the basis of personal good as such, but, personal good subordinated to the common

²⁷ J. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, p. 178.

²⁸ C. Taylor, *The Moral Topography of Self*, in: *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, eds. S. B. Messer, L. Sass, R. L. Woolfork, New Brunswick 1988, p. 298.

good. For even when we relativize or rationalize about the ontic value structure, while prioritizing other lower values, it is important to note as observed by Tadeusz Styczeń that, “the subject matter of cognition is the obligation to respect the human person for their sake, given in a specific normative experience”²⁹. This duty is a demand which conditions moral value, appeals to the wellbeing and dignity of the person as moral subject, and places the person first in value consideration. It also aligns with the divine and natural obligation on man to work so as to conquer the earth, develop himself and improve nature and human society.

In the experience of act, there exists in the ideal of value-ladenness of work this understanding that work has a transitive character, given that meaningful work begins with man as subject of work, because through his work, man expresses dominion over creatures. And man, also re-creates and manifests himself in his work, and so, affirms that work is a necessary means of expressing humanity and realizing personal fulfilment. Thus, we can rightly say that the supreme character of the value of each person constitutes the basis of work in the ideal of value-ladenness, which in turn tends towards the actualization of the value of the person, without which, the absolute goodness experienced as the absolute value of work is lost. We abstract in this ideal of work that, the supreme value of the person ranks higher than any other value experienced at work, it is also the same value that the person expresses in himself and between co-workers at work, as well as what the person experiences in his work.

Furthermore, the ideal of value-ladenness of work in realizing the fullness of the person, expresses the truth as the foundation of human endeavours, and the basis on which man can freely engage at work. By understanding truth of the person as the foundation of work, it suggests that, man in his choice of work, must first consider his absolute personal worth, which is basic in the hierarchy of values. This demonstrates that freedom per se is and should be subordinated to truth, so as to direct human work to the transcendent dignity of the person. According to John Paul II, there is this essential bond between human freedom and truth, so that freedom which refuses to be bound to the truth would fall into arbitrariness, which ends up submitting itself to the vilest of passions, to the point of self-destruction”³⁰. For in this understanding of freedom, man in his work, not only realizes his being, he also understands himself fully as possessing or sharing in the image of God, who first engaged in meaningful work. And so, by engaging in similar work given this attitude towards work, man develops his full potentials and participates in improving nature and development of society.

²⁹ R. Moń, S. Tondel, J. Krokos, A. Waleszczyńska, *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*, Kraków 2019, p. 25.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 4.

This attitude to work fosters the 'I-thou' relationship among workers, and between workers and owners of production, given the character of true atmosphere of freedom that exists at work. In a healthy working condition, given the proper remuneration of work, John Paul II states that; "the person who works desires not only due remuneration for his work; he also wishes that within the production process, provision be made for him to be able to know that in his work, even on something that is owned in common, he is working for himself"³¹. This approach also calls for the right to proper rest to make up for the tear and wear of human labour, the right of having child/children, proper care and treatment of the disabled, and women (especially in their two-fold-nature given work), as well as their right to specific work and duration of work³². Wherefor the value of the person is of utmost importance, and by taking part in decision making, man expresses good sense of responsibility in his work place, which helps in the growth of the organization.

By seeking the realization of the value of the person, the ideal of value-ladenness of work demonstrates that, work is an essential constitution of human nature and a personal and necessary means of self-preservation. Given that, work in its ontic nature is understood as possessing not only material meaning, it has an inherent and transcendent meaning or intransitive meaning, because work links human being with God who through His work brought everything into being. In the absence of precarious and fissured work condition, human work realizes its fundamental goal of human realization, as well as serves as the fundamental defining feature of human personhood and one of the sources of the transcendent dignity of the person. It is only by understanding that work fosters the personal value of the person, that work can be defined as instrument of nation building and means of realizing the truth, goodness and beauty of the person in the community of person and society, in which the person experiences job satisfaction and happiness. The person is here presented as an end, and should always be seen and treated as such, because his work reflects his humanity and self-determination, which should be the priority of work. In the community of persons/workers, the truth of person shines out, and the person experiences kindness/goodness of the other and feels respected.

Accordingly, it is only through a disinterested gift of himself to the other in the community of persons, can man find happiness and reach the fullness of life³³, and as well experience work satisfaction and fulfilment. For the person by contributing through his work to nation building, sees through the goodness of work, not only the beauty of the person, but the wholeness and beauty of the human society. And so, he lives not alienate from the society or from family because of his work, rather, to contribute and realize himself through his mean-

³¹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 12.

³² John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 7.

³³ R. Moń, S. Tondel, J. Krokos, A. Waleszczyńska, *The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*, p. 26.

ingful work. Thus, the attitude of value-ladenness of work, encourages such healthy participation, by creating healthy living community of workers as trade union where proper goal of work is fostered and achieved.

Again, value-ladenness of work while challenging the arbitrariness in the value-free work, expresses the right attitude to living the divine command and natural obligation, to conquer and subdue the earth vivid in human work. It is the right use of reason (*recta ratio*) so as to maintain the proper work attitude and relationship, especially between human worker and modern means of production, and so achieve the wholistic value and goal of work. For amidst the mechanization through technological advancement, it is the person who is the subject of work and supervisor of these machines, whose value is prior and cannot be substituted with any other value. And so, the moral value of the ethics of work that underlies work in the ideal value-ladenness of work, appeals to this epistemic value of the person, whose subjective meaning at work cannot be replaced with the objective meaning, because the objective value which the machine conveys cannot be realized without the subjective value that lies in the person. Despite technological and scientific advancement, they remain indispensable tool and ally of the person in perfecting, accelerating and augmenting human work.

Inasmuch as work output such as wealth, gain or economic value per se are not bad in themselves, however, there is need to maintain balance between these lower values and epistemic value of the person through work. This balance also refers to the relation between machine and human worker. For by maintaining the ontic character of the value of work, machine becomes an ally to the person, as opposed to modern approach where man has become an enemy and slave to machine³⁴, thereby, defeating the natural purpose of work. Again, by detaching freedom from the truth of the epistemic value of the person expressed in the value-free approach to work, the transcendent dignity of man who transcends his being by freely engaging in a meaningful work is demeaned. By engaging freedom to truth in the ideal of value-ladenness, human work becomes consistent with the truth of the person in his integrity. Because recognition of this truth in freedom should certainly motivate work, for it directs human work to its axiological end that tends towards the ultimate goodness and realization of personhood. Thus, authentic human development and self-determination comes when the nature of work is approached and understood as possessing epistemic value, other than purely economic worth; else, the world may enter into another crisis similar or deadlier than the previous experiences of the World Wars. For unless, said John Paul II, “all the considerable resources and potentials at man’s disposal is guided by a moral understanding and by an orientation towards the true good of the human race, these resources easily turn against man to oppress him, and make him slave to pos-

³⁴ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 5.

session or wealth.” Therefore, work and epistemic value of work must constitute the goal of work, and must also be understood and approached as gifts from God which helps man realize their goal, improve nature and develop human society.

Concluding remark

Founded on individual autonomy, total desire for wealth, and pursuit of personal interest, the modern-day approach to work marked by the thought that human work is value-free, manifests exploitative attitudes. For these attitudes reduce the transcendent nature of the humanity of the person to mechanistic and materialistic thing and object of use, given the emphasis about the purpose of work as purely for economic value. This understanding violates the right order of nature, as it portrays a misuse and misunderstanding of true meaning of freedom, which should be subordinated to the truth of the person, as the basis of work. It construes freedom as the basis of human work and stands in opposition to truth. Conversely, the concept of value-ladenness of work supposes truth as the basis of all human endeavours, and so, construes work as possessing intrinsic worth, on the basis of which we grasp the intrinsic worth of the person who is the subject of work. Thus, we deduce that work possesses epistemic value which refers and appeals to the value of the person, likewise, characterises work as immanent and transcendent. By engaging in meaningful work, man responds to this immanent-transcendent value of work without reducing the value of work to any lower worth. For when there is separation of the intrinsic worth from the person who is the subject of work as expressed in the modern approach, human work loses its natural worth. Hence, the absolute goodness which man experiences at work becomes the measure of his relationship with other human being and with other beings.

While recognizing the ontic value of work, various healthy working conditions which express the inalienable dignity of the person become visible; and these differ from the materialistic tendencies that characterise value-free work condition where the integrity of the person is demeaned. Given the emphasis on the objective character of work in the ideal of value-free work, the subjectivity of the person as agent of work is denied, such that the beauty and goodness of the person is lost in the arbitrariness of this conception. And so, realizing happiness at work or work satisfaction becomes difficult, since work in this approach does not in reality reveal the humanity of the person who works, rather, the person becomes object of use and instrument of satisfaction. Whereas, the value-ladenness of work depicts essentially that each person, employer-worker, sees the obligation towards one another and the responsibility expressed in the ethical imperative of work as something that each necessarily ought to do and owe each other. For work, workers and employers are ends and should be taken

as such, because the dignity of work refers not only to the work or employers, but also to the person working³⁵, whose value manifests in the work.

However, actualization of wealth, gain and knowledge per se are not and should not constitute conflict between of values when properly utilized, rather, conflicts arise when the moral value of the ethics of work that characterises human work is subordinated to lower values, consequent to the loss of inherent dignity of worker. Focusing only on realization of wealth or economic value, we experience the situation, according to John Paul II, where the person is construed as an element within the social organism, a mere cog in a machine, such that, the goodness which absolutely belongs to the person is completely reduced to functionality and utilization of socio-economic mechanism³⁶. Inasmuch as organizations and institutions set work values, but any value that does not align with or not subordinated to the epistemic value of the person who is the subject of work, defeats the greatest good, nature of work and purpose of human being. For there should be a necessary connection between the person who work and the work, a connection necessitated by epistemic value, else the purpose and meaning are lost.

Indeed, reducing the core of work to pure desire for wealth and economic value in the fissured attitude towards work, expunges work of its natural content, demeans the person and affects the moral value of human activities. The negative implication of this situation affects the family structure taken to be the foundation of human society. Given the alienation of husband and wife from each other and from their children, while entrusting the responsibility of child(ren) upbringing to the care of one partner, given the separation by work. Therefore, when we fail to recognize and approach the value of work from its ontological worth in relation to the value of the person as subject of work, we construe the person as mere instrument to be used, denying the nature of work as where man re-creates and defines himself. By recognizing these qualities of work, we construe that work manifests the personalistic value and constitute as the instrument of realization of human personhood.

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The Analysis of Value-Free or Value-Ladenness of Work in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching of John Paul II

Summary

This article presents the metaphysical study of work. Based on this understanding, the author makes a comparative analysis of the dilemma: whether human work is value-free or value-laden in realizing the fundamental purpose

³⁵ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, No. 6.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, No. 13.

of work, and proper understanding of personhood. It compares absolute value in the epistemic value of the person with economic value as what people experience at work. It also investigates which of these values in the contemporary approach to work realizes the fundamental goal of work and personhood. The author aligns with John Paul II's Social Reflection on value of work in relation to human person, and discovers that value-ladenness of work realizes both the purpose of work and self-determination.

Keywords: value, work, value-freedom, value-ladenness, personhood, self-determination.

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