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The importance of work in human life and development. The consequences of unemployment

Abstract: Work is an inseparable part of our lives. Thanks to work homo sapiens evolved from the animal world. Through work we can fulfill a major part of our needs. It is also necessary for us to develop. Therefore, it seems that work and values resulting from it should be easy to define. However, is it really that simple? The aim of this paper is to present ways of defining human work, as well as to determine its meaning in human life. For this reason, the author also discusses the issue of unemployment and its psychological and social consequences.

Key words: human work, unemployment, human development, labor market, dimensions of national cultures.

Introduction

The analysis of the issue should start from the etymology of „work.” Researchers refer to several sources, e.g. according to Janusz Sztumski, its equivalent is the Greek *ergon*, which Homer used in the sense of a „huge burden” (Sztumski, 2017, p. 9). In the context of work, antic Greeks used *ponos*, described by Bronisław Biliński as follows: „the concept of *ponos* brings together two fundamentally different aspects of the gentry and aristocracy: *ponos* as path to fame full of dangers, and daily ordinary *ponos* as the effort made by a small man” (Quoted after: Sztumski, 2017, p. 9). Krzysztof Hajder finds the origin of „work” in Latin *labor* or *laboris*, which means „effort,” „burden,” „suffering” or „disease” (Hajder, 2012, p. 19). The term „work” is related to the concept of „energy” as a labor resource stored in a body or a set of bodies. Energy in science is equal to what economics describes as the capital (Mrówka, 2014, p. 291).

Although the definition of the concept of human labor depends on many factors, including historical, cultural and socio-economic ones, it may also have its foundations in philosophy, economics or social sciences (Ibidem,

2012, p. 21). Stanislaw Brzozowski highlights that primitive peoples were exposed to natural factors and they actually defined the type and form of work aimed at developing the environment (Ibidem, p. 19). Furthermore, family communities treated work as the obligation of all fit family members (Furmanek, 2013, p. 24). This means that the communities of a low level of development treat work as a means of barter or a form of coercion (Sztumski, 2017, p. 8). During the period of slavery and feudalism, physical labor was shameful for a noble-born person. Thus, those systems expressed contempt to work and workers (Tomanek, p. 1), and gratitude and reciprocity coincided with coercion and violence (Furmanek, 2013, p. 25).

The transformation described above stimulated research on human cooperation, social attitudes and the creation of moral standards of social life (Skurjat, 2015, p. 137). The research also focused, of course, on stricte human work. „Paradoxes of human life show that what is described as an ordinary human fate is often difficult to be subjected to theoretical reflection.” According to the above statement, expressed by Jerzy Gałkowski, the concept is one of the vaguest terms, although it is present in the humanities and natural science (Gałkowski, 2012, p. 5). „The concept of work has multiple definitions formulated from different points of view. Individual sciences use different definitions. Various sciences developed different concepts of work, although they all are denoted with the same term” (Quoted after: Oleksa, 2012). Each of the sciences has its own definition of work corresponding to research needs (Tomanek, p. 2). Therefore, those definitions are so different that sometimes they are mutually exclusive (Gałkowski, 2012, p. 5).

The article presents ways of defining human work, shows the complexity of the concept, as well as to determines its meaning for our lives. The following research questions helped developing conclusions to the comparative analysis:

- What determines the method of defining and approach to human work?
- Does work play a sublime role in human life and development?
- What needs and values are implemented through work?
- What are psychological and social consequences of unemployment?

Defining the notion of human work

In the economic context, the following seems to be the most complete definition: „On the one hand, work is an organized human activity leading

to the creation of products and services needed by the society, and on the other, to the acquisition of funds needed for development and improvement of living standards” (Hajder, 2012, pp. 19–20). The definition, however, should not neglect other aspects of human work, namely the social context associated mainly with intangible cultural and social values arising as a result of human work (Furmanek, 2013, p. 27). For this reason, it is worth referring to definitions of human work created for the purpose of psychology, pedagogy, praxeology, or philosophy and ethics.

Psychology explains what mechanisms associated with human psyche and behavior determine the importance of work in human life. The *Leksykon pedagogiki pracy* (or Lexicon of Work Pedagogy), published in Radom in 2004, contains over 40 definitions of the term (Oleksa, 2012, p. 13). In this sense, human work is understood, inter alia, as „a system of activities highlighted and designed to transform the environment, performed more or less constantly by a contractor who has formal qualifications.” Praxeologists draw attention to the objective of work, and therefore they stress that work is a chain of acts which purpose is to meet basic needs to overcome difficulties related to it (Tomanek, p. 2). Pedagogy, however, emphasizes educational aspect of work in the life of a man. Tadeusz Waclaw Nowacki, a pioneer of work pedagogy in Poland, stated that work is not an instinctive activity and a source of pleasure but a comprehensive operation aimed at producing objectively valuable outcomes (Oleksa, 2010, p. 14). He added: „in its essence, in the employee activity, which marks spiritual and physical effort made to achieve the objective of producing valuable outcome and, while overcoming the resistance of the matter, developing the ability to select appropriate resources” (Quoted after: Oleksa, 2010, p. 14). In philosophical and ethical terms, it has been highlighted that today human work is a value in itself, because in addition to personal development it provides satisfaction and professional fulfillment; However, it can also be a source of frustration and dissatisfaction (Hajder, 2012, p. 21). Such approach to work was initiated by protestants who perceived it as a path to salvation, and an activity shaping our virtues (Ibidem, p. 20). While trying to encapsulate it in a definition, human work is „free, however necessary, human activity resulting from the sense of duty, combined with effort and joy, and it is intended to create socially relevant spiritual and tangible values” (Quoted after: Hajder, 2012, p. 21).

The majority of definitions is a hybrid of economic and social contexts. Additionally, the social pressure resulting from certain responsibilities toward the society has been recently often emphasized (Oleksa, 2010,

p. 14). Today, it is also believed that work should not be detrimental to human health and it must be appropriately remunerated. The principle has been expressed in *Laborem exercens* by John Paul II, who said that the man has priority over objects and work, which are mere means to exist, increase capital and professional self-actualization (Tomanek, p. 1) „Work not only is marked by human effort but in work a man discovers the sense of existence. Work includes the basic dimension of human existence which comprises everyday human life and from which a man derives their inherent dignity. But it also includes human effort, suffering, and harm and injustice” (Quoted after: (Furmanek, 2013, p. 29).

Among all of the above definitions, we can distinguish a common belief that human work is the purposeful activity which leads to a specific „utility” (Hajder, 2012, p. 23). From the social point of view, other common features include physical and emotional effort, as well as mental, physical and moral development (Oleksi, 2010, p. 15). The intensity of individual values resulting from human work also depends on the nature of that work, which can be mental and physical, light and heavy, simple and complex. Additionally, due to the legal criterion, we distinguish formal non-formal, and informal work (Furmanek, 2013, p. 26).

The development of skills, personality and interests shapes the world of a man who becomes *homo creator* (Jabłonko, 2014, p. 127). Regardless expectations of an employee towards work, it should be stressed that work plays a major role in his/her life and in the functioning of the whole society. It shapes belief, aspirations, social status, position and it is a source of income.

Importance of work in human life and development

Work as an operation is particularly important for people because thanks to it *homo sapiens* was able to evolve out of the animal world (Sztumski, 2017, p. 7). Although work have provided a significant stimulation for development, the awareness of the fact appeared quite late through the scientific reflection on the activity (Sztumski, 2017, p. 7).

According to J. W. Gałkowski, it may be considered: „in terms of the concept of the world, man, mutual relations between a man and the world, and in terms of assessments and standards related to the role and importance of work for a man” (Quoted after: Wilsz, 2008, p. 1). Aspects of work related to its values can be divided into the following: psychologi-

cal and physiological (natural need to development), economic (creation of goods that are socially relevant and meet various needs), moral (conscious and free action which is subject to moral assessment) (Wilsz, 2008, p. 1). The discussion of the importance of work in human life should, however, start from a question about its sense. Everyone seeks to achieve their goals, values thanks to which our life makes sense (Jabłonko, 2014, p. 133). Work can be their source and its moral value involves references to humane values that played a fundamental role for societies from the time immemorial. Platoon claimed that a man seeks truth, good and beauty. Therefore, we may conclude that work and functioning in the work environment are the carrier of these values (Ibidem, p. 132). A man develops tangible and intangible outcomes, he/she is respectively a manufacturer and creator of ideas. They have a certain economic value, but more importantly a social value.

Work is an essential part of life, an acts influencing human culturally, socially and psychologically (Tomanek, p. 6). The product which is the fruit of work affects the social position and thus makes work playing a major role in each sphere of human life. For this reason, it is an element motivating people in their personal development. Work provides tangible and emotional conditions to live (Ibidem, p. 4). It allows to fulfill one's needs, understood as states in which a man desires to fulfill shortages of objects or substances (Wilsz, 2008, p. 3). The notion of needs and values is linked with the concept of the hierarchy of needs by Abraham H. Maslov, a lead representative of the humanistic psychology (Ibidem, p. 4). The theory has been presented in the form of a pyramid which shows that needs determine aspirations and desires of a man (Ślebarska, 2005, p. 442). Lower needs are situated at the base and more complex ones at the top of the pyramid (Wilsz, 2008, p. 4). He distinguishes the two groups of human needs – basic (shortages) and accompanying ones (Tomanek, p. 3). A. H. Maslov outlined the following hierarchy of needs as follows: „physiological, security, belonging and love, respect and recognition, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization”¹ (Wilsz, 2008, p. 4). The group of fundamental needs includes the first five of those listed. Once we meet one, we climb up consecutive levels of the hierarchy. We start from the lowest level (met externally), and move upward (needs met internally) (Ślebarska, 2005, p. 442). A large part of these needs can be met

¹ One may also use a simplified hierarchy of five needs: physiological, security, belonging, esteem, self-actualization (Ślebarska, 2005, p. 442).

through work, e.g. the sense of belonging, respect and recognition, self-actualization, as well as lower ranking needs, such as physiological needs and security, since those are met through results of work, e.g. salary (Tomanek, p. 3). This has been confirmed by scientific studies carried out by *Futuribles International*, which have shown that more and more people stress the importance of work in their systems of values – employees appreciate non-economic aspects of work, including the feeling of safety (Jabłkonko, 2014, p. 126).

A typology needs by David C. McClelland simplifies the above hierarchy: the need for power (control over one's own and other people work), affiliation (love, membership, relations with other people), and achievement (Wilsz, 2008, p. 5). It is also worth to describe the typology by K. Hajder, since it completes the description of needs and values resulting from human work. He distinguished the following functions of work: self-actualization, economic, income, and social (Hajder, 2012, p. 22). The economic function refers to the universal nature of work, resulting from our own needs and obligations towards the society. It is one of fundamental components in the history of human. The above has been described by Jan Galarowicz: „A man becomes a man with the sense of responsibility, when he discovers himself as a responsible being” (Quoted after: Jabłkonko, 2014, p. 129).

It should be noted that every man is an individual being who is looking for and fulfills selected values and needs through work. However, the impact on our system of values is determined by the national culture, as confirmed by Geert Hofstede,² understood to be the „collective programming of the mind to distinguish members of one group or category from the other” (Quoted after: Hofstede Insights, *National Culture*).³ The G. Hofstede's project was implemented in 1967–1978 and its goal was to collect information about various cultures. Being an employee of an international corporation (IBM) in 1967–1971, he collected information about attitudes (his surveys included questions such as: „Do you like your work?”) and values (e.g. indication of factors which apply to your

² Geert Hofstede – one of major authorities in the field of intercultural psychology dealing with the “study of similarities and differences between people belonging to different culture and ethnic groups. He studied relationship between psychological and socio-cultural and biological factors and the examination of their changes” (Quoted after: Subocz, 2012, p. 41).

³ It should be emphasized that the results are relative since every man, with his/her views and behaviors, is unique.

dream job among workers) (Hofstede, 1983, p. 77). To put it simple, attitudes reflect observations whereas values correspond to desires. His surveys contained about 160 questions and 63 of them referred to values associated with work. We may distinguish five theme groups: „Satisfaction, perception, personal goals and beliefs, and demographics” (Subocz, 2012, p. 44). The study involving the same employees was repeated in 1971–1973. It produced 116,000 questionnaires recorded in a digital databank. It facilitated the analysis of cultures in 40 countries. The study has proven that questions concerning values revealed fairly stable differences between particular national cultures (Hofstede, 1983, p. 77). Based on the above, he distinguished the following dimensions of⁴ national cultures:

- *power distance* which means acceptance and expectation that power is distributed unequally;
- collectivism and individualism – collectivists stress that working conditions are important, the use of their strengths and knowledge, as well as training and courses, whereas individualism means putting own needs first and much relaxed relations in a given social group;
- masculinity and femininity – this dimension is related to the role of women in society, gender equality, attitude to marriage (Nowek, *Podział Geert’a...*). Masculinity at work means the drive towards awards resulting from success and competition, whereas femininity is expressed through modesty, cooperation and dialog (Subocz, 2012, p. 43);
- uncertainty means how we cope with the unpredictable, including: religion, law, technology (Nowek, *Podział Geert’a...*). It has been encapsulated in the following question: „Should we try to control and influence our future or let it happen?” (Subocz, 2012, p. 43);
- short-term and long-term orientation. The former means pressure on consumption, respect tradition and care of social bonds. The long-term orientation is linked to systematic effort, possibility to adapt to changing conditions and directional operation (Nowek, *Podział Geert’a...*).

Geert Hofstede stated that the national culture cannot change, but we should understand and respect it. It seems that the same happens with the nature of the human and the work should an exercise to achieve good luck with values stemming from the work being carried out.

⁴ Dimensions refer to various aspects of a phenomena which can be expressed in figures.

Social and psychological consequences of unemployment

Work is so important in man's life that unemployment has been the subject of studies by many scientific disciplines, including law, economics, political science, sociology and psychology. The first attempts to define the concept date back to the early 20th c. The definition evolved and the unemployment has been defined from various scientific points of view (Nowosielska, 1995, p. 8). Unemployment is one of the main challenges of the world faced by all countries. This is a multi-faceted phenomenon which depends on economic, legal, social, technical and cultural factors. It is not easy to define the concept and classical economists refer to it as the „surplus population.” The first to use the term unemployment was John Atkinson Hobson at the end of the 19th century (Staszewska, 2012, p. 17).

Richard Sennett distinguishes two types of working people: *animal laborens* and *homo faber*. The former is similar to an animal, since work is the value and purpose in itself (He asks question: „How?”). *Homo faber* shapes his social life through work – he assesses work (He asks question: „Why?”) (Wyrostek, p. 499). Other researchers identified three main attitudes to work: punitive (man treats work as obligation imposed by state or society against his will), instrumental (work is only source of income required to meet needs), and autotelic (work is aim in itself, as it helps to meet higher needs than physiological ones) (Hajder, 2012, p. 20). This division is justified by the fact that employees have several kinds of motivation to work: material, social, and psychological (Szymczak, Gawrycka, p. 278).

Unemployment is a social and psychological, moral and economic issue (Lemański, 2000, p. 363). The unemployment rate, and therefore the situation on the labor market, has a strong impact on the society. Unemployment translates into reduced purchasing power and adversely affects living conditions and demand, which in turn affects production and employment. Consequences of unemployment should be seen from the point of view of an individual as well as socio-economic dimension of a community, or a social unit, e.g. a family (Hajder, 2012, p. 66).

In the psychological sphere, unemployment disrupts family life and may also lead to social pathologies (Gasińska, 1995, p. 6). Each day without work reduces our self-esteem and we encounter the sense of guilt and shame before our family and the community (Hajder, 2012, p. 74). This status has a number of social consequences for such social groups as

marriages, local communities, and finally has its impact on the entire society. A high unemployment rate leads to a growth of offenses and crimes, which means higher budget expenditure, and produces a state that can be described as “crime psychosis” (Olak, 2014, p. 149). In the context of the role of an unemployed person in a family, we may distinguish the following consequences: educational problems related to the lack of security; social ones due to reduced self-esteem; emotional-expressive ones which manifest themselves in marriage conflicts and weakening of parents authority; cultural ones – due to a decrease in the standard of living people resign from spending on culture (Ibidem, p. 150).

According to the 2013 survey among unemployed people living in the Ślupsk County, office workers suffer much harder when they are unemployed since they feel that they waste their skills and they are ashamed to share the fact with their relatives (Szymańska, Zienkiewicz, 2013, p. 162). Manual workers, however, are much more exposed to faster deterioration of their family position which may easily lead to marriage conflicts. Therefore, education is of paramount importance (Ibidem, p. 163) and long-term unemployment leads to the „degradation of human capital” (Ibidem, p. 153).

The psychological importance of work is expressed in the fact that work shapes social skills, enables professional fulfillment, stimulates self-improvement and also help to set goals. For this reason, unemployed people cease to practice their individual and social competences, and no longer satisfy any previous requirements set by the employer and the community. We may distinguish three stage of reacting to unemployment: shock or optimism, pessimism and fatalism (Drela, 2015, p. 136). In terms of psychology, it is worth mentioning individual consequences of unemployment, i.e. fear or symptoms of depression (e.g. sadness, indifference).⁵ Their often lead to suicidal thoughts. However, a question should be raised whether it is the loss of work that leads to a suicide or it happens when people predisposed lose their jobs (Śmiglin, p. 429). Research on the relationship has already continued for over 200 years, but still the issue remains unsolved (Bańka, p. 30). The unemployed have lower mental health parameters and they show higher risk of mental illness – although the difference is not major (Śmiglin, p. 429). On top of that, we have higher risk of concentration and orientation problems, as

⁵ Symptoms of depression are far more frequent than anxiety in the case of unemployment risk. According to researchers, this can be explained is the fact that they are more dangerous for a man (Bańka, p. 29).

well as negative emotions and frustrations which is accompanied by the sense of *helplessness* and *hopelessness* (Ibidem, p. 430). The vivacity of reaction depends on the period of staying unemployed, stage of life and the age of the unemployed person, attitude to work, role in the family and gender (Hajder, 2012, p. 72). According to the theory by Marie Jahoda, unemployment distorts the structure of time, diminishes social experience, changes the social and professional status, hampers identification with colleagues at work, and promotes accidental activities (Bańska, p. 26).

Studies confirm that the unemployed are slightly more susceptible to mental disorders, they have lower mental health parameters and are exposed to psychosomatic illnesses (their basis is psychological, but symptoms are physical), such as allergies, respiratory and cardiovascular disorders (Drela, 2015, p. 137). On the other hand, research based on the *General Health Questionnaire*, i.e. a questionnaire evaluating mental health of adults, have shown that for 6 months of work loss, symptoms clearly intensify. This level, however, has not increased between 6th and 30th month, quite contrary it actually steadily decreased. This means that the risk of occupational exclusion does not have to lead to mental disorders, but it much depends on the resistance to stress (Hajder, 2012, p. 73).

What psychological mechanisms are responsible for these disorders? According to Sigmund Freud, unemployment is the situation in which a man cannot reach a mature personality (ego), and consequently cannot satisfy inherent and instinct desires (i.e. sex and aggression) by way accepted by the society (i.e. through work). It means that he perceived work as a way for the survival of an individual and the society, as well as a substitution activity aimed at meeting needs, such as sexual instincts and pleasure (Bańska, p. 26). Under the influence of Karl Marx and quoted above S. Freud, Erich Fromm came to the conclusion that work determines independence and self-expression. However, mass culture and society work in such a way that multiple duties do not bring satisfaction, and it is only a way satisfy material needs. According to E. Fromm, work deprived of the above mentioned determinants is a mere contract which is transferred by employees to their social life. It gives work a cold not authentic emotionless nature. An unemployed person is deprived of the possibility of self-expression and it means that a person is not in a position to develop a mature personality. Such a person becomes lost in simple pleasures, intoxicants and consumption (Ibidem, p. 27).

Apart from obvious negative consequences, unemployment may also have some positive ones. They are mainly related to short-term unem-

ployment (transitional). It affects competitiveness on the labor market, restricts employees' demands, need to improve one's skills, and translates into profit generated by employers (Cieślukowski, 1998, p. 261). Risk also stimulates discipline among workers who are mobilized and limit their expectations to keep their jobs. According to some researchers, frictional unemployment, understood as inability to find work for a short period by people who comprise a labor reserve, may have a positive dimension. The positive dimension is related to the fact that employers use this group to regulate the level of employment. Additionally, it strengthens competition on the labor market (Ibidem, p. 262). Considering the above, it should be stressed that unemployment, as a phenomenon, encourages people to undergo training and self-improvement. It is also very often a factor stimulating migration and translates into competitiveness. Labor mobility decreases the number of unemployed and it means reduced public spending on unemployment benefits. On the one hand, the influx of labor from other countries also enhances competitiveness, although it may adversely affect the employment of citizens of a given state. On the other hand, the employment of cheap labor gives entrepreneurs a chance to development due to lower labor cost (Ibidem, p. 263).

Conclusion

Unemployment leads to an emotional imbalance, reduces the self-esteem, and its psychological consequences manifest themselves in stages (Drela, 2015, p. 137). Additionally, we may frequently observe the „collapse of the time structure” – the agenda is no longer developed by working hours, and people just kill time (Śmiglin, p. 430). Financial constraints also reduce the standard of living and limit the possibility of acquiring goods, which determines the social status. In consequence, self-esteem and social position are reduced (Drela, 2015, p. 133).

Since in consequence of unemployment self-esteem and social position diminish, this may promote isolation from other people. The loss of a job relaxes contacts with colleagues, or those are intentionally limited due to shame. Additionally, during the initial phase, unemployed people face higher risk of psychological and psychosomatic disorders (Cieślukowski, 1998, p. 261). Issues discussed in this article prompt to conclude that work is tremendously important in our lives, and we, as workers, are increasingly aware of the fact. Although it is difficult to de-

fine, human work is a “pervasive multi-faceted element used to meet various goals” (Jabłonko, 2014, p. 133).

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Znaczenie pracy w życiu i rozwoju człowieka. Skutki bezrobocia

Streszczenie

Praca stanowi nieodłączny element naszego życia – to dzięki niej ze świata zwierzęcego wyodrębniło się *homo sapiens*. Poprzez pracę realizujemy szereg naszych potrzeb, jest ona także niezbędna do tego byśmy się rozwijali. Wydaje się, że pojęcie to jest proste do zdefiniowania, jak i określenie płynących z niej wartości nie powinno nastroczać wielkich problemów – czy aby jednak na pewno? Celem niniejszego referatu jest próba przedstawienia sposobów definiowania pracy ludzkiej, a także wskazanie jej znaczenia w życiu człowieka. Z tego powodu autor omawia równie szeroko zagadnienie bezrobocia oraz jego skutki psychologiczne i społeczne.

Słowa kluczowe: praca ludzka, bezrobocie, rozwój człowieka, rynek pracy, wymiary kultur narodowych

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