

Introduction

I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no man can ever know.

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

After primal man had discovered that it lay in his own hands, literally, to improve his lot on earth by working, it cannot have been a matter of indifference whether another man worked.

—Sigmund Freud,
Civilization and Its Discontents

Work is so overarching in our daily lives that we tend not to see or contemplate it. The ways in which we humans organize our work guide individual fortune, interactions with other persons, interconnections among groups, and structuring of the wider society. As we shall see in my opening chapter for this book, *work* has one of the broadest ranges of meanings of any word in English. Thus work is diffuse not only in our social relations but in our language as well.

This collection of essays is a contribution to the ongoing considerations of the meaning of work in sociocultural anthropology

(ethnology) and the cognate social sciences drawn on by this discipline.¹ The book integrates perspectives on work by ethnologists and sociologists, perspectives both stemming from their common intellectual traditions and overlapping and complementing one another in current scholarship. As will be made abundantly clear to the reader, the essays of the four sociological authors address ethnological concerns of work in the manner of this discipline, and the papers of the five ethnologists deal with concerns of work central to the discipline of sociology. This collection, then, offers the reader a truly melded-disciplinary approach to the study of work. After profiting from the cross-disciplinary discussion of the subject of this book, the reader may well wonder why so many joint departments of anthropology and sociology were split apart over the past several decades.

Each of the authors in this book sees work as the central human concern and as what makes us human. All treat work as the central social activity of humans: performed by an individual with reference to and often in cooperation with others, usually for the use of others, and always with regard to collectively carried patterns of culture. Most of them see work in market economies as radically changing with profound consequences for each of us personally, our families, our communities, and our countries.

From the sibling perspectives of anthropology and sociology, *Meanings of Work: Considerations for the Twenty-First Century* examines interconnected social and cultural dimensions of human work including the economic and industrial relational. This collection provides a cross-disciplinary basis for understanding the fast changing patterns of work in a now globally unitary market, increasingly beset with frightening problems such as growth of contingent employment and decline of the Western middle class. In its concentration on considerations of work, the book includes specifically invited essays from Herbert Applebaum, Marietta L. Baba, Ivar Berg, Judith R. Blau, Amitai Etzioni, Walter Goldschmidt, June Nash, and Robert Weiss. Each of these authors have made noteworthy contributions either to the broad multidisciplinary field of industrial and organizational social science or to the still wider rubric of the social science of work.

In ten chapters, the authors of this book discuss the scope, utility, applications, and limitations of historical and contemporary ideas, analyses, and theories of the integration of societies through human work organizations, their occupational and related social statuses, and guiding ideologies. Meanings of work include a range

of considerations: the development of ideas about work in Western cultures; work as career in tribal and peasant societies; postindustrialism, post-Fordism, and the crisis in world capitalism; the contingent character of the American middle class; the inequalities in the social relations of work; the constraints of the webs of bureaucratic rules concerning work; and the relations between work and technology in modern society. Included also are the issues of discontent and satisfaction generated by work; the cultural meanings and the myths of work; the exercise of power in work; the decision-making process of work as affected by emotions and values and limited by the ability to deliberate and process information; the social expectations of work and nonwork, including the distinguishing of work from leisure; and the reactions to and processes of retirement from work. In this introduction, themes are reviewed from the considerations of work presented by the chapter authors.

Although the book is published in the SUNY Series in the Anthropology of Work, the volume is intended for a wider market—across the social and managerial sciences, including industrial and human relations. This book treats work both cross-culturally and historically without losing sight of the fact that most college students in the United States and Canada desire to learn about the world of work in which they will spend most of their mature years: the best, and the worst, years of their lives.²

ESSAYS ON MEANINGS OF WORK

Considerations of Work

To frame the myriad conceptual strands of the nine following essays, my opening chapter considers a number of broad concerns about work, from how we think about it to pressing issues of contemporary employment or lack of it. The chapter ponders ideas and concepts of work, including linguistic and folk backgrounds. The personal, social, and temporal dimensions of work are considered. Then, a concept of work is constructed, applicable cross-culturally, yet still useful in investigating market-based societies, where most exchange occurs today.

Reviewed next are the central place of work in social scientific research and the long tradition of the community study in North America and its emphasis on work. Contemplated after this are issues of today's work such as employee participation in managerial control of work and the effect of values on the direction of technology.

Finally, the problematic future of work, including the frightening new labor market, is examined. In my opening chapter and in my later interrelated chapter on the web of rules for work relations, a large number of sources are used and cited and are suggestions for further reading on considerations of the meanings of work.

The Concept of Work in Western Thought

To begin, Herbert Applebaum provides this anthology with a historical perspective on the idea of work in Western thought. It is this body of thought that is the basis for social science as it is known today throughout the world. Such thought ranges from the broad conceptions including culture, society, personality, the place of humans in the animal kingdom, and the adaptation of humankind to the environment; to somewhat less broad constructs such as cultural materialism, role sets, normative systems, market exchange, open-system organizations, literary criticism, and social pluralism; to the theories and analyses of the narrower range that overflow from our journals, monographs, reports, and scholarly discourse.

Applebaum covers concepts and views concerning work in the classical world, in medieval Europe, and in the societies of modern Europe including its extension into North America. His analyses of ideas of work are grounded in the sociocultural anthropological perspective of holism, which holds that work is an activity found in all aspects of human life including the family, politics, economics, religion, and so forth. Applebaum reviews the notions from various periods espoused by thinkers who have had an enduring influence on current ideas of work. From Aristotle, to Calvin, to Adam Smith, to Marx, to Arendt, to Gorz, Applebaum examines the salient roots of the social science of work.

He concludes his essay with a discussion evaluating our contemporary changing values concerning work, leisure, and projections for work in the future. Reasons Applebaum, the human condition does compel us to work as a condition of life, and work creates our human-constructed environment. Given this historical framing of this collection of essays, what is "work" in our culture and where are our historically rooted ideas about it taking us? The following essays expand upon these queries.

Work As Career in Premodern Societies

In his essay, Walter Goldschmidt focuses on what careers mean to the character of tribal and agrarian societies. He develops an

integrated theory of society and work. In this, the individual is viewed as a motivated actor and not as a passive recipient of central values and role prescriptions, written on his or her mental tabula rasa by the imprint of culture. Goldschmidt's theory treats as the central dynamic in the formulation of institutions the mental process within humans that arouses, maintains, and then directs behavior, that is, motivates, toward career goals. Although accepting cultural definitions, each person adapts to conventions in an individual way. Individual initiative and community restraints relate in a kind of dialectic, fostering change.

Goldschmidt concludes, in striving for careers, humans do not live for bread alone. Their underlying motivation is dual, in the form of both material rewards and social gratifications, including definition of the self. The natures of these rewards and satisfactions are shaped by culture as it operates and changes over time.

A person's pursuit of these two kinds of goals is viewed by Goldschmidt as a career. Because in traditional societies, performances of work tasks are similar, careers are related to the basic economy of production and other ecological circumstances. Careers are shaped by the work tasks required among humans for the necessities of life: provisioning, protection, and reproduction. Careers are thus formed by the kinds of work and collaboration for work needed by the community. Most work cannot be done as individual effort but requires some joint effort. Thus African pastoralists invariably have some kind of age-graded organization to institutionalize cooperation in herding and warfare. But, if the economy of production changes to horticulture, then the age grades become dysfunctional.

The Social Structure and Relations of Work

Ivar Berg examines a number of issues central to a theory of work. He uses as part of his theoretical base an idea he has helped develop, that of the "web of rules" for the social relations of work in any society, from preliterate to industrial. Berg delineates microscopic, mesoscopic, and macroscopic structures of work and the social forces related to them.

The three central bodies of actors in the web of rules for work are managers, workers, and concerned government members. The rights and duties of these three actors regarding work are affected, directly and indirectly, by macroscopic forces, including societal and cultural impetuses such as national laws, national customs, and background norms. And the three are thus affected by microscopic forces, comprising the dynamics of organizations, formal and

informal groups within these, cliques, and other collectivities. Between these two levels are the mesoscopic forces, comprehending those generated by the division of labor in society, social strata, industries, communities, national unions, political parties, and regional labor markets, among other elements.

The utility of Berg's threefold division of interactions in the social structure of work is apparent when we consider the results of the scope of our customary research on work. We conduct microscopic-level studies from observation of work sites and from surveys of individuals in plants and of broad spectra of the actors of work. Studies of these kinds have results in the writings of the human relations school and the psychologically inclined, more recent offshoots of this body of theory. Such studies also resulted in the reports of the adherents of some manner of emphasis on the quality of work life and on worker involvement, or participative management. But, when we read the literature on work conceptualized from a perspective above the micro level, findings indicate fewer, and more complex, options available to employers interested in reducing their employees' dissatisfactions with the job. (For example, in an extreme instance, the forces of the globalized market and the international division of labor might transfer the work of both the manager and the managed in a Michigan plant to a location south of the border with Mexico, in the *maquiladoras*. Here there could be no options for addressing the dissatisfactions of the Michigan workers.)

In his essay, Berg analyzes this kind of disjunction resulting from a researcher's myopic focus on micro analyses of work. He describes a reconceptualization of work according to the perspectives of the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. With such a reconceptualizing, we can find the true core of the structures and processes of work—involving authority and control relations and including hierarchy and superordinate-subordinate relations.

Work and Technology in Modern Industrial Organizations

Marietta Baba examines the closely interrelated concepts of "human work" and "technology." As she relates, the range of definitions of each of these concepts frequently overlap. Moreover, depending on the discipline and the theorist of work, the concepts could be virtually indistinguishable. Confusion between conceptualizations of work and technology generate several theoretical issues. These include whether work behavior and organization should be considered part of work culture, part of technology, or both. As

assumed by sociotechnical systems theory, these issues also include whether work and technology are governed, respectively, by independent sets of laws relating to social and physical phenomena.

Answers to the questions concerning these issues have serious implications for management of organizations and policy for government. This is because these answers indicate whether technological considerations should be primary in the design of the organizations and the technology of work. In her essay, Baba discusses the muddle in the issues related to the intricate construct of work-technology and explores some alternative paths toward clarification of the issues.

Reviewed by Baba are three models of causal relationship between work and technology. These include technological determinism, sociotechnical systems theory, and the cultural (or social) construction of technology. Each of the three, in some way, view work as subordinated to technology. Since the Hawthorne studies, however, fieldwork in industry finds various aspects of work activity not under the total domination of technology and the managers who control it.

Baba, then, examines the situations in which spontaneous and informal work activity have a strong effect on technology and the production flowing from it. Here particular activities of informal work solve problems of production creatively, problems not amenable to solution in the realm of formal technological information. Such work activity constitutes a creative frontier for new technology. This process of work, enhancing and creating technology, she concludes, must be comprehended if production is to achieve standards of quality and efficiency competitive in the globalizing economy.

Work Relations and the Web of Rules

In my own essay, I apply the idea of the "web of rules," or interrelated regulations and prescriptions of all kinds for the relations of work, to ethnological ends. Although the conceptual framework of the web of rules for studying a work force was first developed by Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, two scholars outside of anthropology, they specifically said use of their construct enters the preserve of the anthropologist. As an anthropologist of work, I use the idea of the "web" in three ways.

First, I develop an overall ethnological formulation of the framework of the web for application to the entire range of human societies from the technologically simple to the hyperindustrial.

Second, from my own fieldwork, I explore the use of the web construct on traditional, that is, nonmodern, societies—among hunter-gatherers and among peasants of an agrarian state. Third, from my applied studies in industrial and organizational ethnology, I show the utility of the web construct for understanding the work relations of American railroaders. As proper in the use of the web, emphasized is the historical development in American society of various elements of this network of regulations for work relations. In this third purpose, continuity is maintained from an industrial and organizational ethnology originating, along with industrial and organizational sociology and psychology, more than six decades ago in the Hawthorne project.

To examine a single theoretical concept usable heuristically with the aid of the idea of the web of rules and that can be universally used for all of the range of societies, I select that of property rights in work. By this is meant the worker, whatever the relation to the controllers of the toil, has a right or interest regarding value of some kind in his or her work. This examining of a single theoretical concept with the aid of the web is part of my development of an overall ethnological formulation for applying the framework of the web cross-culturally.

In modern times, the process of industrialization has destroyed the traditional property rights to work. Accordingly, much of today's activity in labor-management relations concerning social power and control revolves around attempts by workers at restoration of some kind of strong attachment to livelihood. As one of the oldest industries and by far the oldest with a federal element in the web of rules, the railroads are selected to examine for industrial society the development of property rights to work and of other related economic security of the worker.

Postindustrialism, Post-Fordism, and the Crisis in World Capitalism

June Nash analyzes both the postindustrial models of society by Daniel Bell and by Alain Touraine and the "Fordist" models of corporate welfare policies in society by Michael Aglietta, Alain Lipietz, and others. Based in part on her long-term fieldwork in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Nash develops an alternative model of contemporary society in its later phases of industrial restructuring. Bell posited a modern economy featuring a decline in manufacturing and other production of goods and an increase in production of services. Ascendant in the social order of this economy are the professional and technological occupations, constituting a new class.

Touraine posited a parallel socioeconomic development in France, with an expanding power and influence of the technocrats—scientists, engineers, and managers. Fordist theories of work, of varying emphases, concern a welfare capitalism. These theories center on the sharing with labor by paternalistic firms of some of the gains from increases in rationalized productivity and on the development of mass markets for standardized, relatively inexpensive consumer goods.

Nash argues insightfully with her alternative model for late industrial society. To begin, the arenas for social change are outside the new technological hierarchies discussed by both the postindustrial and post-Fordist theoreticians of work. Instead, she affirms, these arenas are shifting to the export-producing regions of industrializing countries. And they are shifting to the ranks of both the unemployed and underemployed in the declining older industrial areas, such as that of Pittsfield, and in stagnating economies of the Third World. Such emerging arenas cannot be adequately dealt with by postindustrial or Fordist theories, which are applicable only to a narrow sector of the increasingly global economy.

The Work-Contingent Character of the American Middle Class

In her essay Judith Blau, relates how conventional social scientific wisdom posits that an industrial mode of production will generate a middle class. But, argues Blau, the conditions for development, since our Civil War and especially since World War II, that have supported a large and diffuse middle class in America are now changed in fundamental ways. Middle class values, even espoused by some of the rich, include those relating to working arduously and devotedly and enjoying resultant achievement. A middle-class normative system with such central values has engulfed our entire society.

According to Blau, the American middle class is constructed culturally on an ethos of participatory democracy in which every citizen has a voice and on the central value of the American work ethic—working hard and thereby “making it” economically. But such ideal charters for American society are contradictory to the growing political inequalities, undemocratic organizations of work, and hierarchies of society.

In her examination of the issues she raises, Blau enters the arena of the long-standing debate on whether class is rooted more in the dynamic forces of the political economy or in that socially learned, collectively carried system of information we call culture.

This debate was under way with Marx and Weber, was continued by the Lynds and Lloyd Warner, flared again in the 1960s with the arguments over the validity of Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty, and burns in the 1990s with the interpretations of the roots of poverty in the United States.

Blau holds that the institutional underpinning of the American middle class was contingent upon a unique set of historical conditions. This broad, national class may well be an ephemeral entity. Individual achievement and competition of the able in the marketplace may no longer be "paying off," as it was once thought to do. The current "American middle class" could in significant part constitute a memory culture, reflecting a golden yesteryear that never quite was. And it undoubtedly reflects the short period energized by abundant cheap fuel, 1946-73, a time of relatively stable relations of work between employers and the employed in which most shared in an expanding economic pie.

Processes of Retirement from Work

Robert Weiss bridges work life and the period of retirement beyond it. He reports analyses of his findings from a study of professionals and managers and the ways in which they approach retirement and, then, use these postwork years. Generally, retirement is not a circumstance that his subjects of research actively sought. Accordingly, how do such workers become retired?

Many gradually withdrew from work because of ill health, often as part of the aging process. If unable to perform their jobs, such people were reluctant to continue at work, but such a realization was at first resisted. Some subjects felt in some way misused by their employer. Their reasons varied. Despite this diversity of complaints, a common theme emerged. Each had devoted a part or all of his or her work life to a firm that proved ultimately to be uncaring. Retirement for them was an ending of a bad relationship, with hard feelings as a result, similar to a divorce.

Some respondents were forced out of their employment by handshakes varying from fairly golden to totally leaden. Some were told: retire or be fired. And some were archly asked about their plans for retirement. Often, older workers were marginalized, reassigned to less important and less prestigious responsibilities. Such an act by management greased the skids for retirement. At times, the worker and those with whom he or she worked withdrew from one another, in a process of social dissociation resulting from an increasingly tense conflict between the parties.

Retirement has as its universal attraction only a negative, freedom from the need to deal with the stresses of work. Just one respondent had a positive postretirement attraction that drew him away from his world of work. Reasonable monetary packages for retirement do not produce this state for workers, but these do make retirement possible. As Weiss concludes, retirement is almost always motivated by a desire for retirement *from* work, a process in which the worker and the organization of work gradually mutually distance themselves until final separation. Retirement is rarely *for* attainment of a postwork goal. Again, work is central in our lives.

The Socioeconomic Perspective for the Study of Work

Amitai Etzioni concludes this collection of essays by examining for the study of work the utility of a unified, socioeconomic perspective, combining views from neoclassical economics with those from the social sciences. In this perspective, it is posited that people not only maximize their satisfaction but also react to their moral values. Utility, then, is twofold, happiness and its facilitating morality. Individual, rational self-interest is balanced against responsibility to the community. Because humans have been highly social, community-bound animals since time immemorial, it is not surprising that self-interested behavior must in some part be explained at the level of a socially learned collective consciousness, or culture. Society is not a confining set of fetters; it is the humanness of the hominid animals. Humans not only have their rational choices skewed by their encompassing normative system but also by their emotions. Furthermore, the individual decision maker's abilities to collect, assess, and process information for rational choices are socially and neurologically limited.

With his essay, Etzioni prepares a systematic overview of human work while applying the new socioeconomic viewpoint. He explores the nature of work and the varied rewards that cause people to so toil. Then, he discusses the shortcomings of the views of neoclassical economists, who hold that money is the sole incentive for work. The inner gratifying characteristics of humans' work must also be taken into account. Work also has a dimension of intrinsic rewards.

In this vein, Etzioni examines the ways in which work is preferred by Americans over leisure. (This is a circumstance discussed also by Weiss in his study of becoming retired.) The human desire for work and its satisfactions indicates that the classic view of work as a "cost," often referred to as "labor," is only partially correct.

Labor, then, is more than one of the major factors of production in which money is paid as compensation for mental and motor exertions; and monetary cost is not the total compensation furnished by a firm for labor. Clearly, it is not valid to treat all persons in all jobs as if they were merely labor and not workers. People work for a variety of motives that are psychic, sociocultural, and economic. Work, therefore, is in part a moral activity. Because different societies place different moral valuations on work, the nature of work is culturally relative.

Finally, Etzioni discusses the modern family, its division of work, and its customary exchanges among unequals (usually between the market-and-credit superior husband and the wife, deficient in these attainments). Not only does one find in the family structured exchanges based on work among those who are social unequals, but also one finds "We" zones of shared interests and identifies. A creative and constantly adjusting tension exists, between competing, acquisitive individuals, on the one hand, and the sharing family group, on the other hand. The familial division of labor, accordingly, is not a stark Hobbesian arena, as depicted by some schools of thought.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to my wife, Marilou Gamst, for her typing and editing of the drafts of my writing in this collection of essays, for her comments on my ideas and data, and for her constant support and assistance. Her able participation was essential for the completion of the book, as it has been for the field and library research either influencing or directly reported in my writing of chapters 1 and 6.

Some aspects of a majority of the essays in this book were presented as papers at a session during the joint annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association and the Society for the Anthropology for Work in New Orleans in November 1990.

2. This book is intended for use in courses on applied anthropology, anthropology of work, economic anthropology, industrial and organizational sociology, sociology of work, industrial and organizational psychology, management science especially organizational studies, economics of labor and work, industrial relations, and human relations.