



Labor

In the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized. This is unfortunate at a time when so many writers who once made their living by explicit or tacit borrowing from the great wealth of Marxian ideas and insights have decided to become professional anti-Marxists, in the process of which one of them even discovered that Karl Marx himself was unable to make a living, forgetting for the moment the generations of authors whom he has "supported." In this difficulty, I may recall a statement Benjamin Constant made when he felt compelled to attack Rousseau: "J'éviterai certes de me joindre aux détracteurs d'un grand homme. Quand le hasard fait qu'en apparence je me rencontre avec eux sur un seul point, je suis en défiance de moi-même; et pour me consoler de paraître un instant de leur avis . . . j'ai besoin de désavouer et de flétrir, autant qu'il est en moi, ces prétendus auxiliaires." ("Certainly, I shall avoid the company of detractors of a great man. If I happen to agree with them on a single point I grow suspicious of myself; and in order to console myself for having seemed to be of their opinion . . . I feel I must disavow and keep these false friends away from me as much as I can.")¹

II

' 'THE LABOUR OF OUR BODY AND THE WORK OF OUR HANDS' ' 2

The distinction between labor and work which I propose is unusual. The phenomenal evidence in its favor is too striking to be

1. See "De la liberté des anciens comparée a celle des modernes" (1819), reprinted in *Cours de politique constitutionnelle* (1872), II, 549.

2. Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, sec. 26.

ignored, and yet historically it is a fact that apart from a few scattered remarks, which moreover were never developed even in the theories of their authors, there is hardly anything in either the pre-modern tradition of political thought or in the large body of modern labor theories to support it. Against this scarcity of historical evidence, however, stands one very articulate and obstinate testimony, namely, the simple fact that every European language, ancient and modern, contains two etymologically unrelated words for what we have to come to think of as the same activity, and retains them in the face of their persistent synonymous usage.³

Thus, Locke's distinction between working hands and a laboring body is somewhat reminiscent of the ancient Greek distinction between the *cheirotechnēs*, the craftsman, to whom the German *Handwerker* corresponds, and those who, like "slaves and tame animals with their bodies minister to the necessities of life,"⁴ or in the Greek idiom, *tō sōmati ergazesthai*, work with their bodies (yet even here, labor and work are already treated as identical, since the word used is not *ponein* [labor] but *ergazesthai* [work]). Only in one respect, which, however, is linguistically the most important one, did ancient and modern usage of the two words as synonyms fail altogether, namely in the formation of a corresponding noun. Here again we find complete unanimity; the word "labor," understood as a noun, never designates the finished product, the result of laboring, but remains a verbal noun to be classed with the gerund, whereas the product itself is invariably derived from the word for work, even when current usage has followed the

3. Thus, the Greek language distinguishes between *ponein* and *ergazesthai*, the Latin between *laborare* and *facere* or *fabricari*, which have the same etymological root, the French between *travailler* and *ouvrer*, the German between *arbeiten* and *werken*. In all these cases, only the equivalents for "labor" have an unequivocal connotation of pain and trouble. The German *Arbeit* applied originally only to farm labor executed by serfs and not to the work of the craftsman, which was called *Werk*. The French *travailler* replaced the older *labourer* and is derived from *tripalium*, a kind of torture. See Grimm, *Wörterbuch*, pp. 1854 ff., and Lucien Fèbre, "Travail: évolution d'un mot et d'une idée," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Vol. XLI, No. 1 (1948).

4. Aristotle *Politics*|1254b25.

actual modern development so closely that the verb form of the word "work" has become rather obsolete.⁵

The reason why this distinction should have been overlooked in ancient times and its significance remained unexplored seems obvious enough. Contempt for laboring, originally arising out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy of remembrance, spread with the increasing demands of *polis* life upon the time of the citizens and its insistence on their abstention (*skhole*) from all but political activities, until it covered everything that demanded an effort. Earlier political custom, prior to the full development of the city-state, merely distinguished between slaves, vanquished enemies (*dmōes* or *douloi*), who were carried off to the victor's household with other loot where as household inmates (*oiketai* or *familiares*) they slaved for their own and their master's life, and the *dēmiourgoi*, the workmen of the people at large, who moved freely outside the private realm and within the public.⁶ A later time even changed the name for these artisans, whom Solon had still described as sons of Athena and Hephaestus, and called them *banausoi*, that is, men whose chief interest is their craft and not the market place. It is only from the late fifth century onward that the *polis* began to classify occupations according to the amount of effort required, so that Aristotle called those occupations the meanest "in which the

5. This is the case for the French *ouvrier* and the German *werken*. In both languages, as distinguished from the current English usage of the word "labor," the words *travailler* and *arbeiten* have almost lost the original significance of pain and trouble; Grimm (*op. cit.*) had already noted this development in the middle of the last century: "Während in älterer Sprache die Bedeutung von *molestia* und schwerer Arbeit vorherrschte, die von *opus*, *opera*, zurücktrat, tritt umgekehrt in der heutigen diese vor und jene erscheint seltener." It is also interesting that the nouns "work," *œuvre*, *Werk*, show an increasing tendency to be used for works of art in all three languages.

6. See J.-P. Vernant, "Travail et nature dans la Grèce ancienne" (*Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, LII, No. 1 [January-March, 1955]): "Le terme [*dēmiourgoi*], chez Homère et Hésiode, ne qualifie pas à l'origine l'artisan en tant que tel, comme 'ouvrier': il définit toutes les activités qui s'exercent en dehors du cadre de l'*oikos*, en faveur d'un public, *dēmos*: les artisans—charpentiers et forgerons—mais non moins qu'eux les devins, les héraults, les aèdes."

body is most deteriorated." Although he refused to admit *banausoi* to citizenship, he would have accepted shepherds and painters (but neither peasants nor sculptors).⁷

We shall see later that, quite apart from their contempt for labor, the Greeks had reasons of their own to mistrust the craftsman, or rather, the *homo faber* mentality. This mistrust, however, is true only of certain periods, whereas all ancient estimates of human activities, including those which, like Hesiod, supposedly praise

7. *Politics* 1258b35 ff. For Aristotle's discussion about admission of *banausoi* to citizenship see *Politics* iii. 5. His theory corresponds closely to reality: it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of free labor, work, and commerce consisted of non-citizens, either "strangers" (*katoikountes* and *metoikoi*) or emancipated slaves who advanced into these classes (see Fritz Heichelheim, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Altertums* [1938], I, 398 ff.). Jacob Burckhardt, who in his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* (Vol. II, secs. 6 and 8) relates Greek current opinion of who does and who does not belong to the class of *banausoi*, also notices that we do not know of any treatise about sculpture. In view of the many essays on music and poetry, this probably is no more an accident of tradition than the fact that we know so many stories about the great feeling of superiority and even arrogance among the famous painters which are not matched by anecdotes about sculptors. This estimate of painters and sculptors survived many centuries. It is still found in the Renaissance, where sculpturing is counted among the servile arts whereas painting takes up a middle position between liberal and servile arts (see Otto Neurath, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Opera Servilia," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. XLI, No. 2 [1915]).

That Greek public opinion in the city-states judged occupations according to the effort required and the time consumed is supported by a remark of Aristotle about the life of shepherds: "There are great differences in human ways of life. The laziest are shepherds; for they get their food without labor [*ponos*] from tame animals and have leisure [*skholazousin*]" (*Politics* 1256a30 ff.). It is interesting that Aristotle, probably following current opinion, here mentions laziness (*aergia*) together with, and somehow as a condition for, *skholē*, abstention from certain activities which is the condition for a political life. Generally, the modern reader must be aware that *aergia* and *skholē* are not the same. Laziness had the same connotations it has for us, and a life of *skholē* was not considered to be a lazy life. The equation, however, of *skholē* and idleness is characteristic of a development within the *polis*. Thus Xenophon reports that Socrates was accused of having quoted Hesiod's line: "Work is no disgrace, but laziness [*aergia*] is a disgrace." The accusation meant that Socrates had instilled in his pupils a slavish spirit (*Memorabilia* i. 2. 56). Historically, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between the contempt of the Greek city-states for all non-political occupations which arose out of the enormous demands upon the time and energy of the citizens, and the earlier, more original, and more general contempt for

labor,⁸ rest on the conviction that the labor of our body which is necessitated by its needs is slavish. Hence, occupations which did not consist in laboring, yet were undertaken not for their own sake but in order to provide the necessities of life, were assimilated to the status of labor, and this explains changes and variations in their estimation and classification at different periods and in different places. The opinion that labor and work were despised in antiquity because only slaves were engaged in them is a prejudice of modern historians. The ancients reasoned the other way around and felt it necessary to possess slaves because of the slavish nature of all occupations that served the needs for the maintenance of life.⁹ It was precisely on these grounds that the institution of slavery was defended and justified. To labor meant to be enslaved by necessity,

activities which serve only to sustain life—*ad vitae sustentationem* as the *opera servilia* are still defined in the eighteenth century. In the world of Homer, Paris and Odysseus help in the building of their houses, Nausicaä herself washes the linen of her brothers, etc. All this belongs to the self-sufficiency of the Homeric hero, to his independence and the autonomic supremacy of his person. No work is sordid if it means greater independence; the selfsame activity might well be a sign of slavishness if not personal independence but sheer survival is at stake, if it is not an expression of sovereignty but of subjection to necessity. The different estimate of craftsmanship in Homer is of course well known. But its actual meaning is beautifully presented in a recent essay by Richard Harder, *Eigenart der Griechen* (1949).

8. Labor and work (*ponos* and *ergon*) are distinguished in Hesiod; only work is due to Eris, the goddess of good strife (*Works and Days* 20–26), but labor, like all other evils, came out of Pandora's box (90 ff.) and is a punishment of Zeus because Prometheus "the crafty deceived him." Since then, "the gods have hidden life from men" (42 ff.) and their curse hits "the bread-eating men" (82). Hesiod, moreover, assumes as a matter of course that the actual farm labor is done by slaves and tame animals. He praises everyday life—which for a Greek is already extraordinary enough—but his ideal is a gentleman-farmer, rather than a laborer, who stays at home, keeps away from adventures of the sea as well as public business on the *agora* (29 ff.), and minds his own business.

9. Aristotle begins his famous discussion of slavery (*Politics* 1253b25) with the statement that "without the necessities life as well as good life is impossible." To be a master of slaves is the human way to master necessity and therefore not *para physin*, against nature; life itself demands it. Peasants, therefore, who provided the necessities of life, are classed by Plato as well as Aristotle with the slaves (see Robert Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. XLVII [1936]).

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and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life. Because men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force. The slave's degradation was a blow of fate and a fate worse than death, because it carried with it a metamorphosis of man into something akin to a tame animal.¹⁰ A change in a slave's status, therefore, such as manumission by his master or a change in general political circumstance that elevated certain occupations to public relevance, automatically entailed a change in the slave's "nature."¹¹

The institution of slavery in antiquity, though not in later times, was not a device for cheap labor or an instrument of exploitation for profit but rather the attempt to exclude labor from the conditions of man's life. What men share with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human. (This, incidentally, was also the reason for the much misunderstood Greek theory of the non-human nature of the slave. Aristotle, who argued this theory so explicitly, and then, on his deathbed, freed his slaves, may not have been so inconsistent as moderns are inclined to think. He denied not the slave's capacity to be human, but only the use of the word "men" for members of the species man-kind as long as they are totally subject to necessity.)¹² And it is true that the use of the word "animal" in the concept of *animal laborans*, as distinguished from the very questionable use of the same word in the term *animal rationale*, is fully justified. The *animal laborans* is indeed only one, at best the highest, of the animal species which populate the earth.

10. It is in this sense that Euripides calls all slaves "bad": they see everything from the viewpoint of the stomach (*Supplementum Euripideum*, ed. Arnim, frag. 49, no. 2).

11. Thus Aristotle recommended that slaves who were intrusted with "free occupations" (*ta eleuthera tōn ergōn*) be treated with more dignity and not like slaves. When, on the other hand, in the first centuries of the Roman Empire certain public functions which always had been performed by public slaves rose in esteem and relevance, these *servi publici*—who actually performed the tasks of civil servants—were permitted to wear the toga and to marry free women.

12. The two qualities that the slave, according to Aristotle, lacks—and it is because of these defects that he is not human—are the faculty to deliberate and decide (*to bouleutikon*) and to foresee and to choose (*proairesis*). This, of course, is but a more explicit way of saying that the slave is subject to necessity.

It is not surprising that the distinction between labor and work was ignored in classical antiquity. The differentiation between the private household and the public political realm, between the household inmate who was a slave and the household head who was a citizen, between activities which should be hidden in privacy and those which were worth being seen, heard, and remembered, overshadowed and predetermined all other distinctions until only one criterion was left: is the greater amount of time and effort spent in private or in public? is the occupation motivated by *cura privati negotii* or *cura rei publicae*, care for private or for public business?¹³ With the rise of political theory, the philosophers overruled even these distinctions, which had at least distinguished between activities, by opposing contemplation to all kinds of activity alike. With them, even political activity was leveled to the rank of necessity, which henceforth became the common denominator of all articulations within the *vita activa*. Nor can we reasonably expect any help from Christian political thought, which accepted the philosophers' distinction, refined it, and, religion being for the many and philosophy only for the few, gave it general validity, binding for all men.

It is surprising at first glance, however, that the modern age—with its reversal of all traditions, the traditional rank of action and contemplation no less than the traditional hierarchy within the *vita activa* itself, with its glorification of labor as the source of all values and its elevation of the *animal laborans* to the position traditionally held by the *animal rationale*—should not have brought forth a single theory in which *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, “the labour of our body and the work of our hands,” are clearly distinguished. Instead, we find first the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, then somewhat later the differentiation between skilled and unskilled work, and, finally, outranking both because seemingly of more elementary significance, the division of all activities into manual and intellectual labor. Of the three, however, only the distinction between productive and unproductive labor goes to the heart of the matter, and it is no accident that the two greatest theorists in the field, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, based the whole structure of their argument upon it. The very

13. Cicero *De re publica* v. 2.

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reason for the elevation of labor in the modern age was its "productivity," and the seemingly blasphemous notion of Marx that labor (and not God) created man or that labor (and not reason) distinguished man from the other animals was only the most radical and consistent formulation of something upon which the whole modern age was agreed.¹⁴

Moreover, both Smith and Marx were in agreement with modern public opinion when they despised unproductive labor as parasitical, actually a kind of perversion of labor, as though nothing were worthy of this name which did not enrich the world. Marx certainly shared Smith's contempt for the "menial servants" who like "idle guests . . . leave nothing behind them in return for their consumption."¹⁵ Yet it was precisely these menial servants, these household inmates, *oiketai* or *familiares*, laboring for sheer subsistence and needed for effortless consumption rather than for pro-

14. "The creation of man through human labor" was one of the most persistent ideas of Marx since his youth. It can be found in many variations in the *Jugendschriften* (where in the "Kritik der Hegelschen Dialektik" he credits Hegel with it). (See *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Part I, Vol. 5 [Berlin, 1932], pp. 156 and 167.) That Marx actually meant to replace the traditional definition of man as an *animal rationale* by defining him as an *animal laborans* is manifest in the context. The theory is strengthened by a sentence from the *Deutsche Ideologie* which was later deleted: "Der erste geschichtliche Akt dieser Individuen, wodurch sie sich von den Tieren unterscheiden, ist nicht, dass sie denken, sondern, dass sie anfangen ihre Lebensmittel zu produzieren" (*ibid.*, p. 568). Similar formulations occur in the "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte" (*ibid.*, p. 125), and in "Die heilige Familie" (*ibid.*, p. 189). Engels used similar formulations many times, for instance in the Preface of 1884 to *Ursprung der Familie* or in the newspaper article of 1876, "Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" (see Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* [London, 1950], Vol. II).

It seems that Hume, and not Marx, was the first to insist that labor distinguishes man from animal (Adriano Tilgher, *Homo faber* [1929]; English ed.: *Work: What It Has Meant to Men through the Ages* [1930]). As labor does not play any significant role in Hume's philosophy, this is of historical interest only; to him, this characteristic did not make human life more productive, but only harsher and more painful than animal life. It is, however, interesting in this context to note with what care Hume repeatedly insisted that neither thinking nor reasoning distinguishes man from animal and that the behavior of beasts demonstrates that they are capable of both.

15. *Wealth of Nations* (Everyman's ed.), II, 302.

duction, whom all ages prior to the modern had in mind when they identified the laboring condition with slavery. What they left behind them in return for their consumption was nothing more or less than their masters' freedom or, in modern language, their masters' potential productivity.

In other words, the distinction between productive and unproductive labor contains, albeit in a prejudicial manner, the more fundamental distinction between work and labor.¹⁶ It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent. And yet this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends upon it. The modern age in general and Karl Marx in particular, overwhelmed, as it were, by the unprecedented actual productivity of Western mankind, had an almost irresistible tendency to look upon all labor as work and to speak of the *animal laborans* in terms much more fitting for *homo faber*, hoping all the time that only one more step was needed to eliminate labor and necessity altogether.¹⁷

No doubt the actual historical development that brought labor out of hiding and into the public realm, where it could be organized

16. The distinction between productive and unproductive labor is due to the physiocrats, who distinguished between producing, property-owning, and sterile classes. Since they held that the original source of all productivity lies in the natural forces of the earth, their standard for productivity was related to the creation of new objects and not to the needs and wants of men. Thus, the Marquis de Mirabeau, father of the famous orator, calls sterile "la classe d'ouvriers dont les travaux, quoique nécessaires aux besoins des hommes et utiles à la société, ne sont pas néanmoins productifs" and illustrates his distinction between sterile and productive work by comparing it to the difference between cutting a stone and producing it (see Jean Dautry, "La notion de travail chez Saint-Simon et Fourier," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Vol. LII, No. 1 [January-March, 1955]).

17. This hope accompanied Marx from beginning to end. We find it already in the *Deutsche Ideologie*: "Es handelt sich nicht darum die Arbeit zu befreien, sondern sie aufzuheben" (*Gesamtausgabe*, Part I, Vol. 3, p. 185) and many decades later in the third volume of *Das Kapital*, ch. 48: "Das Reich der Freiheit beginnt in der Tat erst da, wo das Arbeiten . . . aufhört" (*Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Part II [Zürich, 1933], p. 873).

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and "divided,"¹⁸ constituted a powerful argument in the development of these theories. Yet an even more significant fact in this respect, already sensed by the classical economists and clearly discovered and articulated by Karl Marx, is that the laboring activity itself, regardless of historical circumstances and independent of its location in the private or the public realm, possesses indeed a "productivity" of its own, no matter how futile and non-durable its products may be. This productivity does not lie in any of labor's products but in the human "power," whose strength is not exhausted when it has produced the means of its own subsistence and survival but is capable of producing a "surplus," that is, more than is necessary for its own "reproduction." It is because not labor itself but the surplus of human "labor power" (*Arbeitskraft*) explains labor's productivity that Marx's introduction of this term, as Engels rightly remarked, constituted the most original and revolutionary element of his whole system.¹⁹ Unlike the productivity of work, which adds new objects to the human artifice, the productivity of labor power produces objects only incidentally and is primarily concerned with the means of its own reproduction; since its power is not exhausted when its own reproduction has been secured, it can be used for the reproduction of more than one life process, but it never "produces" anything but life.²⁰ Through violent oppression in a slave society or exploitation in the capitalist society of Marx's own time, it can be channeled in such a way that the labor of some suffices for the life of all.

From this purely social viewpoint, which is the viewpoint of the whole modern age but which received its most coherent and great-

18. In his Introduction to the second book of the *Wealth of Nations* (Everyman's ed., I, 241 ff.), Adam Smith emphasizes that productivity is due to the division of labor rather than to labor itself.

19. See Engels' Introduction to Marx's "Wage, Labour and Capital" (in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* [London, 1950], I, 384), where Marx had introduced the new term with a certain emphasis.

20. Marx stressed always, and especially in his youth, that the chief function of labor was the "production of life" and therefore saw labor together with procreation (see *Deutsche Ideologie*, p. 19; also "Wage, Labour and Capital," p. 77).

est expression in Marx's work, all laboring is "productive," and the earlier distinction between the performance of "menial tasks" that leave no trace and the production of things durable enough to be accumulated loses its validity. The social viewpoint is identical, as we saw before, with an interpretation that takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become objects of consumption. Within a completely "socialized mankind," whose sole purpose would be the entertaining of the life process—and this is the unfortunately quite unutopian ideal that guides Marx's theories²¹—the distinction between labor and work would have completely disappeared; all work would have become labor because all things would be understood, not in their worldly, objective quality, but as results of living labor power and functions of the life process.²²

It is interesting to note that the distinctions between skilled and unskilled and between intellectual and manual work play no role in either classical political economy or in Marx's work. Compared

21. The terms *vergesellschafteter Mensch* or *gesellschaftliche Menschheit* were frequently used by Marx to indicate the goal of socialism (see, for instance, the third volume of *Das Kapital*, p. 873, and the tenth of the "Theses on Feuerbach": "The standpoint of the old materialism is 'civil' society; the standpoint of the new is *human* society, or socialized humanity" [*Selected Works*, II, 367]). It consisted in the elimination of the gap between the individual and social existence of man, so that man "in his most individual being would be at the same time a social being [a *Gemeinwesen*]" (*Jugendschriften*, p. 113). Marx frequently calls this social nature of man his *Gattungswesen*, his being a member of the species, and the famous Marxian "self-alienation" is first of all man's alienation from being a *Gattungswesen* (*ibid.*, p. 89: "Eine unmittelbare Konsequenz davon, dass der Mensch dem Produkt seiner Arbeit, seiner Lebenstätigkeit, seinem Gattungswesen entfremdet ist, ist die Entfremdung des Menschen von dem Menschen"). The ideal society is a state of affairs where all human activities derive as naturally from human "nature" as the secretion of wax by bees for making the honeycomb; to live and to labor for life will have become one and the same, and life will no longer "begin for [the laborer] where [the activity of laboring] ceases" ("Wage, Labour and Capital," p. 77).

22. Marx's original charge against capitalist society was not merely its transformation of all objects into commodities, but that "the laborer behaves toward the product of his labor as to an alien object" ("dass der Arbeiter zum Produkt seiner Arbeit als einem fremden Gegenstand sich verhält" [*Jugendschriften*, p. 83])—in other words, that the things of the world, once they have been produced by men, are to an extent independent of, "alien" to, human life.

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with the productivity of labor, they are indeed of secondary importance. Every activity requires a certain amount of skill, the activity of cleaning and cooking no less than the writing of a book or the building of a house. The distinction does not apply to different activities but notes only certain stages and qualities within each of them. It could acquire a certain importance through the modern division of labor, where tasks formerly assigned to the young and inexperienced were frozen into lifelong occupations. But this consequence of the division of labor, where one activity is divided into so many minute parts that each specialized performer needs but a minimum of skill, tends to abolish skilled labor altogether, as Marx rightly predicted. Its result is that what is bought and sold in the labor market is not individual skill but "labor power," of which each living human being should possess approximately the same amount. Moreover, since unskilled work is a contradiction in terms, the distinction itself is valid only for the laboring activity, and the attempt to use it as a major frame of reference already indicates that the distinction between labor and work has been abandoned in favor of labor.

Quite different is the case of the more popular category of manual and intellectual work. Here, the underlying tie between the laborer of the hand and the laborer of the head is again the laboring process, in one case performed by the head, in the other by some other part of the body. Thinking, however, which is presumably the activity of the head, though it is in some way like laboring—also a process which probably comes to an end only with life itself—is even less "productive" than labor; if labor leaves no permanent trace, thinking leaves nothing tangible at all. By itself, thinking never materializes into any objects. Whenever the intellectual worker wishes to manifest his thoughts, he must use his hands and acquire manual skills just like any other worker. In other words, thinking and working are two different activities which never quite coincide; the thinker who wants the world to know the "content" of his thoughts must first of all stop thinking and remember his thoughts. Remembrance in this, as in all other cases, prepares the intangible and the futile for their eventual materialization; it is the beginning of the work process, and like the craftsman's consideration of the model which will guide his work,

its most immaterial stage. The work itself then always requires some material upon which it will be performed and which through fabrication, the activity of *homo faber*, will be transformed into a worldly object. The specific work quality of intellectual work is no less due to the "work of our hands" than any other kind of work.

It seems plausible and is indeed quite common to connect and justify the modern distinction between intellectual and manual labor with the ancient distinction between "liberal" and "servile arts." Yet the distinguishing mark between liberal and servile arts is not at all "a higher degree of intelligence," or that the "liberal artist" works with his brain and the "sordid tradesman" with his hands. The ancient criterion is primarily political. Occupations involving *prudentia*, the capacity for prudent judgment which is the virtue of statesmen, and professions of public relevance (*ad hominum utilitatem*)²³ such as architecture, medicine, and agriculture,²⁴ are liberal. All trades, the trade of a scribe no less than that of a carpenter, are "sordid," unbecoming for a full-fledged citizen, and the worst are those we would deem most useful, such as "fishmongers, butchers, cooks, poulterers and fishermen."²⁵ But not even these are necessarily sheer laboring. There is still a third category where the toil and effort itself (the *operae* as distinguished from the *opus*, the mere activity as distinguished from the

23. For convenience' sake, I shall follow Cicero's discussion of liberal and servile occupations in *De officiis* i. 50-54. The criteria of *prudentia* and *utilitas* or *utilitas hominum* are stated in pars. 151 and 155. (The translation of *prudentia* as "a higher degree of intelligence" by Walter Miller in the Loeb Classical Library edition seems to me to be misleading.)

24. The classification of agriculture among the liberal arts is, of course, specifically Roman. It is not due to any special "usefulness" of farming as we would understand it, but much rather related to the Roman idea of *patria*, according to which the *ager Romanus* and not only the city of Rome is the place occupied by the public realm.

25. It is this usefulness for sheer living which Cicero calls *mediocris utilitas* (par. 151) and eliminates from liberal arts. The translation again seems to me to miss the point; these are not "professions . . . from which no small benefit to society is derived," but occupations which, in clear opposition to those mentioned before, transcend the vulgar usefulness of consumer goods.

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work) is paid, and in these cases "the very wage is a pledge of slavery."²⁶

The distinction between manual and intellectual work, though its origin can be traced back to the Middle Ages,²⁷ is modern and has two quite different causes, both of which, however, are equally characteristic of the general climate of the modern age. Since under modern conditions every occupation had to prove its "usefulness" for society at large, and since the usefulness of the intellectual occupations had become more than doubtful because of the modern glorification of labor, it was only natural that intellectuals, too, should desire to be counted among the working population. At the same time, however, and only in seeming contradiction to this development, the need and esteem of this society for certain "intellectual" performances rose to a degree unprecedented in our history except in the centuries of the decline of the Roman Empire. It may be well to remember in this context that throughout ancient history the "intellectual" services of the scribes, whether they served the needs of the public or the private realm, were performed by slaves and rated accordingly. Only the bureaucratization of the Roman Empire and the concomitant social and political rise of the Emperors brought a re-evaluation of "intellectual" services.²⁸ In so

26. The Romans deemed the difference between *opus* and *operae* to be so decisive that they had two different forms of contract, the *locatio operis* and the *locatio operarum*, of which the latter played an insignificant role because most laboring was done by slaves (see Edgar Loening, in *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* [1890], I, 742 ff.).

27. The *opera liberalia* were identified with intellectual or rather spiritual work in the Middle Ages (see Otto Neurath, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Opera Servilia," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. XLI [1915], No. 2).

28. H. Wallon describes this process under the rule of Diocletian: "... les fonctions jadis serviles se trouvèrent anoblies, élevées au premier rang de l'État. Cette haute considération qui de l'empereur se répandait sur les premiers serviteurs du palais, sur les plus hauts dignitaires de l'empire, descendait à tous les degrés des fonctions publiques ... ; le service public devint un office public." "Les charges les plus serviles, ... les noms que nous avons cités aux fonctions de l'esclavage, sont revêtus de l'éclat qui rejaillit de la personne du prince" (*Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité* [1847], III, 126 and 131). Before this elevation of the services, the scribes had been classified with the watchmen of public buildings or even with the men who led the prize fighters down to the arena

far as the intellectual is indeed not a "worker"—who like all other workers, from the humblest craftsman to the greatest artist, is engaged in adding one more, if possible durable, thing to the human artifice—he resembles perhaps nobody so much as Adam Smith's "menial servant," although his function is less to keep the life process intact and provide for its regeneration than to care for the upkeep of the various gigantic bureaucratic machines whose processes consume their services and devour their products as quickly and mercilessly as the biological life process itself.²⁹

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THE THING-CHARACTER OF THE WORLD

The contempt for labor in ancient theory and its glorification in modern theory both take their bearing from the subjective attitude or activity of the laborer, mistrusting his painful effort or praising his productivity. The subjectivity of the approach may be more obvious in the distinction between easy and hard work, but we saw that at least in the case of Marx—who, as the greatest of modern labor theorists, necessarily provides a kind of touchstone in these discussions—labor's productivity is measured and gauged against the requirements of the life process for its own reproduction; it resides in the potential surplus inherent in human labor power, not in the quality or character of the things it produces. Similarly, Greek opinion, which ranked painters higher than sculptors, certainly did not rest upon a higher regard for paintings.³⁰ It seems

(*ibid.*, p. 171). It seems noteworthy that the elevation of the "intellectuals" coincided with the establishment of a bureaucracy.

29. "The labour of some of the most respectable orders in the society is, like that of menial servants, unproductive of any value," says Adam Smith and ranks among them "the whole army and navy," the "servants of the public," and the liberal professions, such as "churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds." Their work, "like the declamation of the actors, the harangue of the orator, or the tune of the musician . . . perishes in the very instant of its production" (*op. cit.*, I, 295-96). Obviously, Smith would not have had any difficulty classifying our "white-collar jobs."

30. On the contrary, it is doubtful whether any painting was ever as much admired as Phidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia, whose magical power was cred-