

WORK, NEEDS AND THREE CULTURES

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March 1984

Work is a central concern for all human beings, "work" is a central concept in any social science. But there is something which is even more central and which immediately brings us closer to the other concept to be discussed here, "culture": needs. I doubt very much that one can have any theory of work without a theory of needs, or at least a typology of needs.

The typology I shall use <sup>(1)</sup> is a very simple one, dividing human needs into four classes, claiming universality for the classes, but not for the concrete definition of the elements inside those classes, and certainly not for the concrete way of satisfying them. The typology looks as follows:

Table 1. A typology of needs with their negations.

	actor- dependent	structure- dependent
material/ somatic	SRUVIVAL (violence; death)	WELFARE (misery; death)
nonmaterial/ mental-spiritual	FREEDOM (repression)	IDENTITY (alienation)

To the left is the distinction between needs that are more material/somatic and those that are more nonmaterial/mental-spiritual (I do not use the expression "psychological" needs, assuming that those would be the needs of, possibly even for, psychologists and less than universal). Like all such brutal cuts into human and social existence it is far too crude, but nevertheless useful. And then there is the distinction between

actor-dependent and structure-dependent needs, needs that for their satisfaction (and particularly for their dissatisfaction) are more dependent on the concrete action of concrete actors, and needs that are more dependent on the enduring operation of social structures.

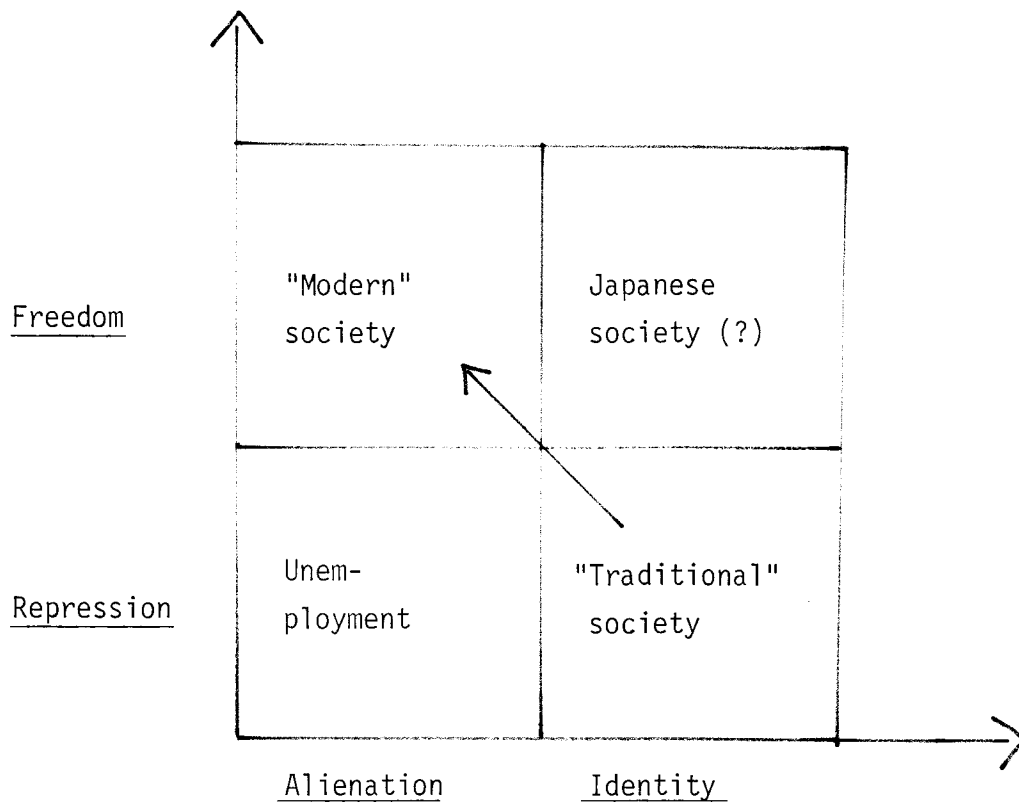
The four words with capital letters put inside the table can only be understood by reading the headings of the table. But they can also be taken in their more immediate meanings: "survival" simply means that, just to survive; on top of that comes "welfare" meaning the satisfaction of all those concrete material/somatic needs for food, clothing, housing, labor-saving devices, health services and schooling, may be also transportation and communication. Some of these border on the mental-spiritual. Both of these two classes of needs can be counteracted in well-known ways, through direct violence leading to death, quickly (for instance by standing in the way of a bullet) and by structural violence also leading to death, but more slowly (for instance by being exposed to a drought, because the water has been channelled away to greener, more income producing pastures).

And then there are the nonmaterial needs, for freedom and identity. I do not see them as an adornment on top of the other two, something that can wait till the other two have been met, one way or the other. I see them as operating all the time, as being expressions or dreams of human beings and for that matter probably also of animals (a zoological garden gives some indication of what it means to an animal only to have the needs for survival and welfare met, not identity and freedom. They look despondent, lackadaisical, apathetic).

About needs much more can be said, but let us proceed immediately to work. I think it is reasonable to conceive of work as the human activity needed <sup>above all</sup> to guarantee survival and welfare, nothing less, nothing more. The <sup>quantitative</sup> level at which survival and welfare are guaranteed will differ in time and space. But the basic point here is something different: work is not merely a question of what, but also of how it is done. And to discuss this "how" I think the other two classes of needs come into the picture, and very importantly so.

More concretely, let us try to make use of the other two classes of needs, "freedom" and "identity" as two dimensions to describe types of work from a more qualitative point of view:

Figure 2. A typology of work



There is a well-known arrow in the figure, as usual pointing from "traditional" society to "modern" society. Nobody will deny the significance, in reality as well as in the theory, of this arrow although it should not be over-estimated; it does not tell the whole story. But the story is important. The point of departure is work with identity, unifying the nature that delivers the raw materials, the soil and the sun, the water and the minerals, the plants and the animals; the people with whom one works, the fellow producers; and the people with whom one consumes, <sup>the work products,</sup> the fellow consumers. All of these are united in an economic

cycle of very limited extension. There is identity with it all, which is not the same as saying that there is harmony. There is an element of insubstitutability, it is this nature, those people - not some other nature and some other people. Precisely because of the lack of substitution possibilities there is an element of repression. One is not "free" or more particularly condemned to be free: one is condemned to be exactly where one is, with rather limited possibilities of moving except, possibly, for the change of some aspects of nature if the mode of production is nomadic.

Then there is what is known as "modern" society or mode of production: the economic cycles are quickly expanding, and more importantly: there is a high element of substitutability. Nature can be fetched from everywhere, the place of production can be changed - one can jump from one to the other and if one does not do so oneself, others do, so that the fellow producers are all the time changing. One can jump from one to the other, and if not doing so oneself, others do, so that the fellow producers are changing all the time. And the same applies to the consumers: changing, shifting all the time, most of them unknown. Of course, the condition for all this substitutability lies in transportation/communication and the introduction of a medium of exchange which facilitated all kinds of substitution much beyond what could be done through barter: money. Buying nature, buying labor, ultimately also buying capital; selling products; that is what "modern" society is about, both in its private and state capitalist formations. An enormous amount of freedom is gained in the sense of substitutability where people are changing their environment or parts of their environment any number of times; but always at the expense of a corresponding level of alienation, of loss of identity.

Thus the world is changing, history moves - we do not say forwards or backwards, history just moves. And behind those two modes are two cultures, very different ones and intimately related to the modes of work. Two work cultures, so to speak, linked by complex transformation processes.

The major dimensions for an analysis would be two very important aspects of any culture: the person-nature relations, and the person-person relation. A traditional work culture would need as its underpinning a tight, close relationship to nature, a strong feeling of identity with exactly this part of nature, not just any. Whether society is nomadic or sedentary, nature is close.

And there would be a similar closeness between people, seeing people not as substitutable but as parts of oneself, much in the same way as nature. Traditional peoples probably used to see it that way; still we are used to think of mediterranean cultures in Europe and traditional cultures in the other continents in that way. And it is probably correct, there is probably much to it.

This means that when these cultural conditions are negated then the stage is set for another type of work, "modern", based on freedom rather than identity. This is impossible without two major cultural constructions: the construction of nature as inanimate, highly substitutable, one piece with the same chemical composition is just as good as any other piece with that chemical composition; one animal of a certain species just the same as another. Needless to say natural sciences were the conditions for this type of construction, imposing on nature a high degree of substitutability precisely by defining equivalence classes in nature, things of the same kind, through endless typologies and generalizations based on abstractions defining essential characteristics.

Similarly, the social sciences were called in to do the same work in order to provide the background for substitutability among people. Psychology defined equivalence classes of people according to aptitude in general and intelligence in particular; pedagogical sciences according to educational level; the science of economics according to their potentials in production and consumption; and sociology/politology/anthropology according to their position in social networks and structures.

But that could only lay a basis for substitutability, not also for individuation. The individual had to be constructed, had to be defined as "man alone", somebody who not only could be detached but also on occasion should be detached. Changes were needed in the most basic aspect of culture, the religious infrastructure. When protestantism is seen as important in this connection it is probably not so much the way Weber emphasized as in a much more simple way, the contribution to the construction of the individual by relating the individuals through his and her deeds and thoughts (particularly the latter) directly

to God. The person became movable under the eyes of God, as an individual in his and her own right. The medium of that mobility was money, hence a strong tie between protestantism and capitalism was only to be expected.

One may say that all of this is trivial; these or similar things have been said again and again. That, however, does not make them less important. It may also be important to point out that there is a two-way relation at work here, not only do changes in culture relate to changes in the way of organizing work; the latter will certainly also lead to the former. Or, perhaps better expressed: a culture based on insubstitutability/collectivism will relate to traditional work in one family with a certain inner consistency, and culture based on substitutability/individualism will relate to modern work in another family, also with a high level of consistency. In other words, they are both reflections of different social cosmologies,<sup>(2)</sup> work is one way of articulating that cosmology, the patterns of belief s another one.

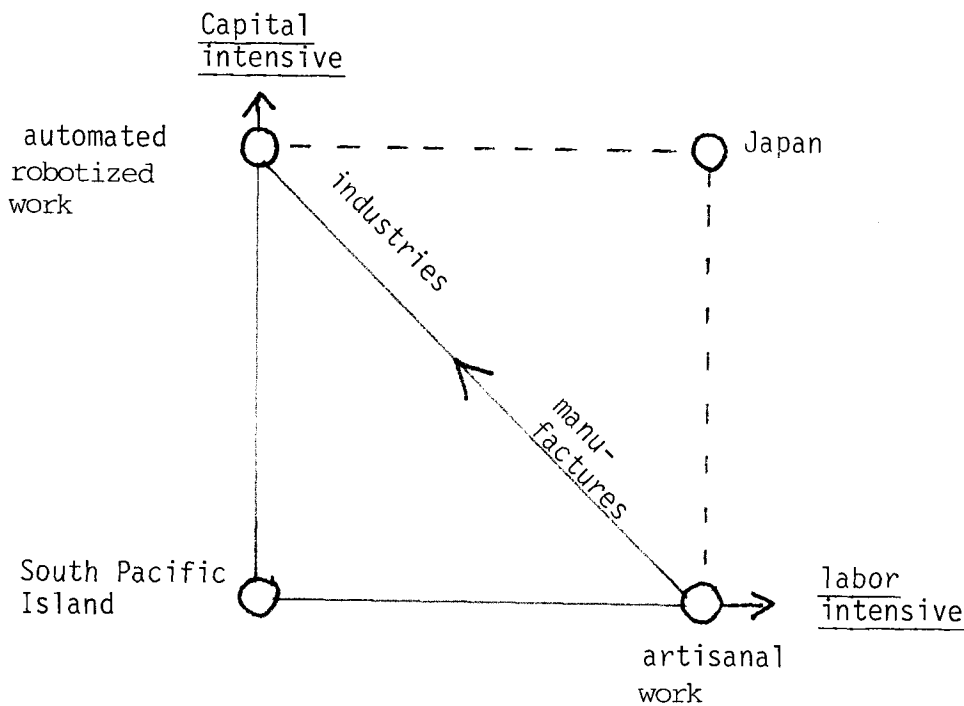
However, having used a fourfold table as a point of departure one is of course also led to the question of what might take place in the other cells. Moreover, is it really true that that arrow is a one-way arrow, or could it possibly function as a two-way arrow? And, in that case, could the process be from here to there and back again, or an oscillating one, possibly also touching the other two corners of the table? In short, could we not make the way of looking at work somewhat more complicated than a simple traditional/modern dichotomy, with an arrow smacking of the 1950s in US social science, from traditional to modern?<sup>(3)</sup>

Of course we can, and one key to that would be to look at what is tentatively seen as the Japanese mode of work or Japanese mode of production, JMP. And here one approach is / to look at the words. The word for work in Japanese is hataraku which also means to function. It sounds very different from the christian conceptualization of work as something painful, something related to sweat and hard labor, in order to earn one's bread. One may say that in the West this was overcome: work is certainly not very hard for very

many, so much so that in "modern" society we tend to refer to it not as work but as job (strangely enough the same word in English to mean exactly the opposite of what that biblical person stood for!). The question, then, is where Japan stands on this dimension between work and job.

The answer is, as is so <sup>often</sup> the case with Japan: <sup>(4)</sup> nor with one, nor with the other, nor in-between, but in a certain sense above, beyond. I think this can be particularly clearly seen if we make use of two other dimensions, also very frequently found in such analysis, to discuss work systems:

Figure 3. Another typology of work.



Down in the right hand corner is a very labor intensive form of work with no capital or almost nothing, put into the means of production. Usually such work is referred to as artisanal, and it is usually seen as traditional and as being high on identity and low on freedom, with little



mobility of factors and products, with little chance of substituting anything for anything.

Many such people can then be put together in one big room, for instance a room vacated by putting an end to a catholic monastery, and the result would be manufacturing, doing it by hand, but many people together, in such a way that there is a certain economy of scale. Some capital is put into the setting for the production, some more complicated means of production are also acquired. But the work is still done by hand, manufacture, without inanimate sources of energy beyond water and wind.

Industry starts, with the introduction of inanimate energy, and is then brought further and further through more and more capital substituting for labor until the ultimate form is found, automated, even robotized forms of work with almost no labor at all. Strangely enough this particular process is very often also referred to as "development" although it actually is a way of getting rid of people in general and the working class in particular. And thus it was, partly, also intended - I presume.

The interesting thing in this particular figure is that there is actually no bottom left-hand corner. There has to be either labor or capital to do work; unless one introduces the South Pacific Island with nature only, abundant, generous, <sup>making work superfluous.</sup> However, this is perhaps not so interesting from our point of view, being a rather extreme case. More interesting is the logical opposite of the South Pacific Island, Japan.

The basic point of Japan, the third work culture to be discussed in this connection, is the way in which ~~that~~ country tries to combine labor-intensive and capital-intensive production. More particularly, this is done by combining artisanry and robotization. May be one could say that the typical Japanese production process is an ARA chain, with three links in it. First comes an artisanal phase, <sup>with</sup> the sub-contractor to the big corporation, very small production unit, often family based, producing parts that go into the process in a rather artisanal way. The quality is very high, the capital input relatively low. One is reminded of the Swiss watch industry and how it related

to Swiss farms, idle during the long winters, working on pieces for that industry.

The second phase is highly industrial, and not only that, it is even automated, robotized. Everything is put together, there are assembly lines and everything associated with the most "modern" industry.

And then there is the third phase where the products coming off the assembly lines from the industrial phase of the total process are regarded more as raw material, to be taken apart again, revised, brought up to a higher level of quality by the proverbial Japanese super-worker, the honko. In this part of the process very high levels of quality can be attained. I would compare it to an author revising the manuscript after he has dictated it and it comes off the "assembly line" provided by the kind services of the secretary who has to listen to all that dictation. It has nothing to do with "quality control"; it is not a question of the author checking every five pages, revising them a little bit here and there. It is a complete re-working of the whole thing, cutting and pasting, bringing out a new product. Often, as is very well known, this process also goes through several stages. The product off the assembly line is an input rather than a finished product; even raw material for this third phase.

The interesting thing about the Japanese mode of production, hence, is that it combines artisanal and superindustrial culture, and consequently also combines identity-oriented and freedom-oriented types of work. There is no doubt that modern natural sciences are used and that a money economy plays an important role, making it possible to substitute one piece of nature for another, one product for another, some times also a worker for another. But at the same time there is no doubt either that in the Japanese factory a high level of identity is operating. To use classical sociological terms: it is universalism combined with diffuseness<sup>(5)</sup>. Everybody is treated according to certain common standards (including promotion according to seniority, and life-long employment), but a wide spectrum of the personality of the employees is taken into account, including what in Western culture is known as personal, private. That cuts down on alienation, creates much more identity, and makes for interesting combinations.

To conclude: we have here clearly three different work cultures, operating in this very same world. And there is also a culture of unemployment, both repressed and alienated at the same time, neither in contact with others, nor possessing the means that makes for "freedom" in a "modern" society. So let me use that to state a little question: could it not be interesting to think in terms of career patterns not so much for societies as for individuals, among these four forms, from one to the other, provided society is rich enough to harbour all of them? And that, ultimately, would be a question of whether it has a culture rich enough to legitimize all four types - including a culture of unemployment, under certain assumptions.

To avoid misunderstandings, however, let me add some notes of caution. I am impressed with the Japanese art of rejecting Western contradictions, working out a both-and where we only manage to see an either-or, like our famous "modern/traditional". In no way, however, does that mean any applause for other aspects of the Japanese Mode of Production, such as the damage to nature; the damage to social structure when a tightly integrated state-capital complex presides over a structure where men exploit women, the young and the old are marginalized and the big corporations exploit the small; not to mention the damage to world society when dependencies abound in a highly competitive world. Seen in that perspective Japan suddenly becomes very similar, even "more similar than most".

Nor is it obvious that some of this cannot be learnt and imitated by others. But aspects of Oriental philosophy, particularly Daoist and Buddhist attitudes to contradictions, no doubt facilitate Japanese practices in this field. And the zero defects mentality and achievement works better in a Confucian climate with well-defined rights and duties. And - the tiny indication given of some aspect of Japanese work culture by no means apply to all: life long employment, for instance, is hardly given to more than 25-30%, and even so almost only to men (but many of these are working in the export sector, so the impact of the work style is felt all around the world.

But even so - once more: there are things to learn! The world still has surprises, fortunately.

N O T E S

[1] See Johan Galtung, "Basic Human Needs", in Lederer, Katrin ed., Human Needs; A Contribution to the Current Debate, Hahn, Königstein, 1988

[2] See Johan Galtung, Social Cosmology: An Approach to Civilization Theory; forthcoming; also see Galtung, Heiestad, Rudeng, "On the last 2.500 years in Western history", The New Cambridge Modern History, Cambridge University Press, 1977; chapter XII.

[3] A typical example would be D. Lerner, The Passing of Traditional Society, Glencoe, Free Press, 1958, made use of in my own Members of Two Worlds, Oslo, Norwegian Universities Press, 1971. The manuscript was completed before my first visit to Japan, spring 1968, expanding all concepts I had ever had in sociology considerably.

[4] See Johan Galtung, "On the Possible Decline and Fall of Japan", in EAST ASIA Yearbook, Campus Verlag, Berlin (West), 1983.

[5] This way of categorizing social interaction is often attributed to Talcott Parsons, but Pitirim Sorokin had the same or very similar "modalities" before Parsons. For a comparison, see Galtung, 1971, pp. 275-77.