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# Small-Scale Production and Meaningful Work: Toward a Community of Gift and Craft

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**SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION AND MEANINGFUL WORK:  
TOWARD A COMMUNITY OF GIFT AND CRAFT**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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by

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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. MEANING-INVESTING ACTIVITY.....	11
3. MEANINGFUL WORK.....	19
4. SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION.....	24
5. THE MEANING IN ARTISANSHIP.....	34
6. CONCLUSION.....	54
REFERENCES.....	57
VITA.....	61

## Abstract

Productive labor is often treated as a means for various ends—for money, leisure, play, etc. This essay argues that work, depending its scale and its relation to community, can be worth doing for its own sake—as an end in itself. Meaningful work is meaning-investing activity. In small-scale production, which involves an intimate relation with the material and an application of practical skill, the producers can invest products with higher-order meaning, imbuing upon them their personhood by which they manifest themselves in public for recognition as persons *qua* workers and for the judgment of others concerning the goodness of the product. The qualities of the product (*viz.*, thought embodied as functional and aesthetic qualities) are the *reasons* offered to another on behalf of their productive activity. The recognition of the qualities as reasons recognizes the producer's personhood (for reasons are offered only between persons) and thereby affirms that the activity was worth doing for its own sake. But this is not sufficient for the perfection of work. Producers also crave judgment from the community on the goodness of the product. In confirming the goodness of the product in judgment, the community (which must also be small in scale) perfects the work for the worker.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Protesting France's refusal to join the United States in invading Iraq in 2003, American conservative groups sought to strike at the heart of the French people. Hoping to cause great offence, they poured imported French wine into the street gutter. Instead of exciting the palate, the precious liquid slid down the storm drain. The act was, as one might expect, criticized in the US, but not in the typical fashion: the wine-defilers were ridiculed for the self-defeating nature of the act. After all, in order to dump wine in the gutter one must first *purchase* the wine. The French already got what they ultimately wanted: payment. As Alan Reynolds from Cato Institute, wrote at the time, "Any French wine available to be poured down the drain is wine that has been paid for by some American. Destroying the wine after buying it does not hurt the French seller, only the American buyer."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even before the Americans purchased the wine both the French producer and the international distributor already received payment. So it seems that the American protesters' stunt was self-defeating. The joke is on them, not the French.

But, despite the silliness of these acts, the wine-defamers recognized something important about the wine and the work put into it. They recognized that products made with personal care and concern carry with them a value that transcends their price. These products secure for the producer more than mere revenue or profit. They are, I submit, imbued with the producers' aspirations for meaningful work, which finds completion not in the termination of work but in the use of the product by another. The protesters indeed recognized something crucial and yet elusive about the wine, namely, that pride, tradition, personality, and even a people's collective sense of themselves went into its production. The French producers had a stake in the product achieving its ends: fellow human enjoyment. Their work was *for* others. The

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Reynolds, "Why Boycotting Wine Won't Work," Cato Institute, accessed from <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/why-boycotting-wine-wont-work>.

producers' satisfaction was bound up in the consumers' proper use and enjoyment of the product. Dumping it down the drain was an affront on the producer.

This producer/product connection is one expression of the much broader human need to invest the world in their activity with a significance irreducible to the material world itself. This investment elevates the world with human sentiment, constructing a social world, as if making pure nature into our image—from bare material (and market value) to something worthy of care, concern, and conservation. This term “investment,” which I frequently use in this essay, refers to what Edmund Burke called “the decent drapery of life,” which he defined as “all the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation.”<sup>2</sup> The social world is an investment overlaid by human activity on the natural world, imbuing it with social meaning that makes possible our ability to relate to others in dignified, collaborative, and mutually understood and elevating ways. Though super-imposed upon the world, this social world is nevertheless the principal feature of the world as we relate to it. To it we go to express our highest worth to others and to recognize that worth in others.

Our activity in the world forms relationships between people, places, and things. A house becomes a home as we act, often with others, in and on it. There is good reason behind what often seems sentimental in our talk of “home”—our activity has elevated it beyond a mere house among houses and a site for security. It remains these things; however, it has been invested as place of dwelling by our activity in it; and even upon moving to a different house, it remains more than a house among other houses. One continues to own it in sentiment. Such places are

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1790]), 77.

more than useful and valuable on the housing market, and the loss or damaging of them by the unwelcomed hands of others is beyond the jurisdiction of commutative justice.

Hence, the violation of these meaningful things and places is more and greater than a violation of property or material damage. It constitutes a deep-seated loss—as if one’s self or person is violated, as a sort of desecration. Property theft from one’s home, whether by burglary or robbery, produces a feeling of loss greater in quality than the market value of whatever items were lifted from the house; one’s relationship to the house has shifted: from a comforting familiarity to disquieting foreignness, as if tainted by an unwelcomed, foreign activity. A place for tranquil activity has been violated and made a place of uncertainty. The home-ness of the house, though immaterial to the house, is the principal feature of the house. In our experience, what matters most is the invasion of the *home*, not simply the theft of property.

As we saw with the guttered wine, products of labor can also be objects of such care and concern—objects that have been elevated beyond simple consumability and usefulness—and imbued with significance that can receive a sort of desecration at the hand of others. This essay shows that, like a house, higher-order features can be predicated of products of work such that place-making<sup>3</sup> and meaningful work belongs to the genus of meaning-investing activity.

These inescapable features of the human being and the human social world, which receives a greater treatment in the next section, is the ground of my argument in this essay. I argue that labor can and even ought to produce products that enter a social world with a meaning higher than market and use values, as things invested with an enduring presence of their makers, as if the producers are embodied in the products, continuing to own them in sentiment even after exchange. Such products present the producers before the world *via* their products.

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<sup>3</sup> I do not discuss place in detail. See Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Meeting certain necessary conditions, work elevates the producer into the realm of the personal by addressing others as persons in the work by means of the product, for the product's qualities are *reasons* offered for the goodness of one's work—reasons being the material cause of inter-personal relations in meaning-investing activity. In the product, the producer's personality as worker is manifested for others, and in so doing, the producer and consumer address each other as persons, each capable of the faculty of judgment, treating each other as ends in themselves. The social investment that raises work into personal relations of production, though irreducible to the materiality of the product, becomes the principal end of production itself; and for this reason, conducting this sort of work is not merely a means, either to a wage or revenue, but is also and chiefly an end in itself. For any activity performed for and in recognition of personhood is worth doing for its own sake.

Hence, on this account of production, exchange, and consumption, the use of the product is *ancillary* to the ultimate end of production. The chief end is the recognition of persons, particularly the person as manifested *via* products as a worker, and thereby raises productive work itself to an end in itself. That is to say, the products of productive work facilitate the mutual recognition of the personhood of both the producer and the consumer—both serving as symbiotes in a symbiosis of production and consumption. By “end in itself,” I mean that by the activity itself one achieves the principal good sought in it. Put negatively, the activity is not a means to another activity by which one achieves the chief good sought; the good is achieved in the activity itself. This does not preclude subsequent, ancillary conditions for the realization of this good, for it is not necessary that one realizes the good of an activity at the time of conducting it. A composer, for example, seeks the best setting for the performance of some composition, but the setting, while necessary for the performance of the composition, is only ancillary to the

achievement of the good sought in musical composition. Similarly, in work one must bring the product to some sort of exchange (or as a gift), but the act of exchange is not the principal end sought in production. Rather the exchange is an ancillary condition of that end. The realization of the good then is retroactive—the worker comes to see past work as work performed for its own sake. Furthermore, this does not preclude the realization of goods *in consequence* of the activity, such as revenue or wages. Hence, the fact that meaningful work serves as a means to various ends does not preclude it from being principally an end in itself.

What is unique about this approach is that while it affirms many common intuitions of meaningful work, such as the necessity of individual creativity, self-satisfaction and independence, it takes it a step further by linking such work to other *persons* and thereby raising it into the distinctively human features of human society. Instead of describing meaningful work as quasi-solipsistic—as something satisfying apart from the satisfaction of others—this essay shows that meaningful work at its highest potential is a matter of both the type of labor and type of community in which one labors. Community has an essential role in meaningful work. Longfellow’s stoical village blacksmith who “earned a night’s repose” for “something attempted, something done” was only half correct, as was Dorothy Sayer who said that “to aim directly at serving the community is to falsify the work; the only way to serve the community is to forget the community and serve the work.”<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, work must be both done well and for the community.

This study does not describe what makes work satisfying, happiness-producing, or even “meaningful,” according to popular usage, for the typical worker in today’s capitalist economy,

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<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?,” Accessed on 4/13/2017 at <http://tnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Why-Work-Dorothy-Sayers.pdf>.

yet I have no intent on disparaging the literature on those topics.<sup>5</sup> Nor is my intent to contribute, at least directly, to the literature on the “corrosion of character” caused by late capitalism.<sup>6</sup> My intent rather is to describe how work can become an end in itself i.e., worth doing for its own sake. This sort of work is what I mean by “meaningful work.” Whether such work makes people happy, I’ll let others decide.

The two basic requirements that I’ve identified—the manner of work and working in a particular type of community—both concern *scale*. Hence, only some work is meaningful work, according to my definition: The sort of work that engenders intimacy and requires the application of hands-on skill with direct intention on material. But it is only *potentially* meaningful, for the product must appear in a community with a scale permitting personal relations of production and consumption. In this way, my account of meaningful labor is suitable for and even works to justify many of the “third-way” approaches to political economy described best with E. F. Schumacher’s title, “Small is Beautiful” or Kirkpatrick Sale’s “Human Scale.”<sup>7</sup> My account is however not fully consistent with socialism or liberalism, the adherents of which have regularly rejected the small-scale or the “petite bourgeoisie” as “economic romanticism.”<sup>8</sup>

Still, this account of meaningful labor does not call for the end of capitalism or for economic revolution. Rather, in application, it calls for individuals in the quotidian aspects of life

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, Steger et al. “Measuring Meaningful Work: The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI)” in *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(3) 322-337.

<sup>6</sup> See Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Human Scale* (New Catalyst Books, 2007 [1980]); *Human Scale Revisited: A New Look at the Classic Case for Decentralist Future* (Chelsia Green Publishing, 2017); and E. F. Schumacher *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (Harper Perennial, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> See V.I. Lenin’s “A Characterization of Economic Romanticism” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1897/econroman/index.htm>.

to reassert their independence in labor and to affirm each other in it. Change in these matters should begin not with a top-down tear-down of the system and a take-over of the means of production, but rather from below, in everyday life—demanding more from us than a set of tweets and participating in public outrage. Realizing communities of meaningful work requires us to be personal with and for others in unobserved places and contexts, not concerning ourselves with the illusion that others are watching and that they care. It's to persons face-to-face that we go, and in so doing reassert the primacy of the *local* in the formation of meaningful work.

### Method and Summary

I rely on phenomenological descriptions of the human person's relationship to the world—that humans necessarily invests the bare, material world in meaning with a superadded social significance irreducible to and undiscoverable on, in or, with the material itself. Such investment is accomplished by meaning-investing activity, and work can be one such activity. To support this contention, I appeal to common experience, which requires the reader's willingness to reflect on one's own set of relations towards things and places that have, in experience, such higher-order meaning. I also appeal to the illuminating descriptions of work from the pens of artisans and theorists of craft.

I organize the argument using the terms of Aristotelian material logic, such as genus and species. This is not to endorse or implicitly rely on Aristotelian metaphysics. Rather, I've found these terms to be useful in delineating my argument (See Figure 1). When I say that small-scale production is meaningful work and meaning-investing activity, I'm identifying two sorts of genera (proximate and remote) to which small-scale production belong (viz. these can be predicated of small-scale production). This means that when describing the essential features of each genus I'm also describing features of small-scale production, for something belonging to a

genus means having all that is essentially true of that genus. The chapters are organized as a movement down from genera to species. In other words, I'm moving from those features that small-scale production shares with other activities down to what differentiates it in species from all other activities. Furthermore, since two species of the same genus share what is common of the genus, it can be helpful to describe a more familiar species to clarify the nature of a less familiar one. This is why I devote some attention to literary work, which I take to be a species of the same genus (meaningful work) as small-scale labor and hence shares with it what is essential of the genus. For these reasons, the reader should keep in mind that even when I am not directly, exclusively, or explicitly addressing small-scale work, I am nevertheless describing it as I progress from its non-distinguishing features to its distinguishing feature.

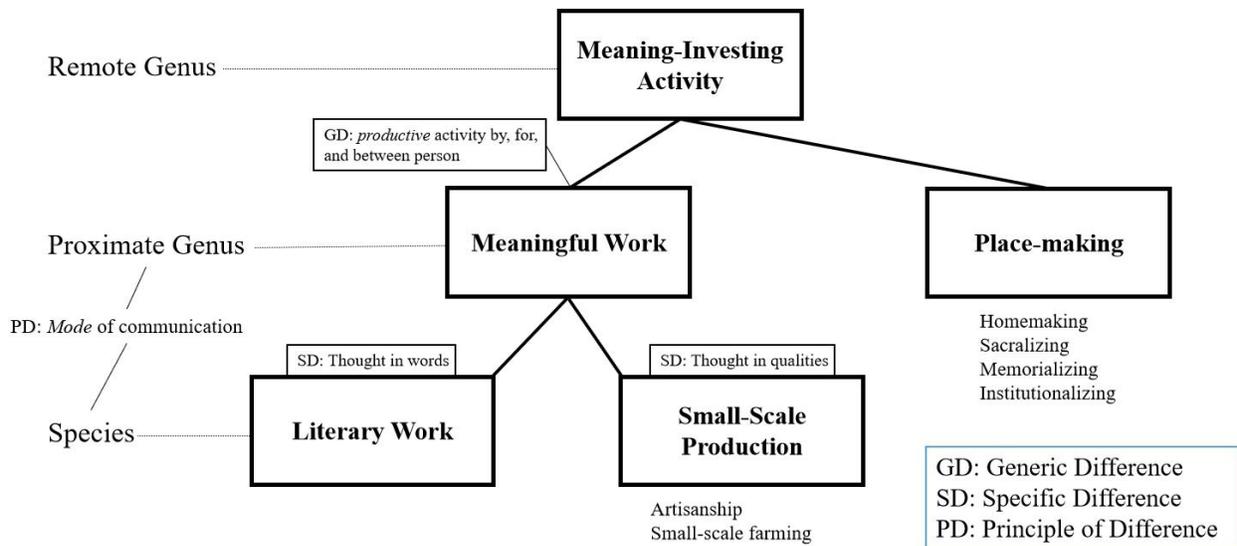


Figure 1. Meaningful Activity Tree

I begin my discussion by describing the remote genus of small-scale production, what I call *meaning-investing activity*. I then proceed to describe *meaningful work* as a proximate genus—of which both literary work and small-scale production are species. Literary work and small-scale production share the same proximate genus. I describe the meaningfulness of small-

scale production synecdochally by describing artisanship in detail, which is one form of small-scale production.

Meaningful work is the sort of work that, due to its scale, makes possible an intimate connection between the producer and product such that one can look upon it as “mine” even when the right of use or ownership has been terminated by exchange (or by publishing contract). That is to say, products manifest to producers their labor embodied, as a sort of mirror by which one encounters oneself for contemplation. The producer, being bound up in the product, publicly seeks both recognition as a person through it and judgment from other persons concerning its goodness. The qualities of the product (i.e., thought embodied as functional and aesthetic qualities) are the *reasons* offered to another on behalf of their activity; this distinguishes small-scale production from literary work (which communicates thought *via* words). The recognition by others of the qualities as reasons *eo ipso* recognizes the producer’s personhood, for reasons are offered only between persons and thereby affirms that the activity was worth doing for its own sake.

But such work is completed or perfected only when the producer’s assertion of goodness is judged as good by the community. Recognizing that a product embodies reasons for its goodness does not *eo ipso* recognize those reasons as *good* reasons (viz. that the product is a good product). Work was worth doing for its own sake (that it was meaningful work) by an act of recognition and it was judged good by an act of judgment.

Crucial to the possibility of judgment is the scale of the community. By “scale of the community,” I refer to the geographic boundary between producer and consumer beyond which the consumer is unable to adequately communicate judgment to the consumer. Prior to the internet, the most suitable community would seem to be the small one, for in a small community

workers are able to see their products in the service of other's good and people are able to provide feedback in person. In an age of internet “reviews” and online feedback, scale might appear to be increasingly obsolete. I will not discuss these complexities here, though they do raise important questions. The principle is that meaningful work requires the interaction of persons before one another in some capacity, which typically occurs and historically occurred when people are geographically proximate to one another. I doubt that the internet can fully facilitate such interactions, though I acknowledge that globalized communication and transportation has opened up markets and have become crucial for the success of many small-scale producers. Regardless of the mode of communication and which mode is best, the principles and end of community *vis-à-vis* meaningful work still apply. Furthermore, while market mechanisms are generally effective in communicating to producers what consumers want, these are impersonal mechanisms. And as economist Wilhelm Ropke said, “Impersonal work has its counterpart in impersonal consumption.”<sup>9</sup> The market signals for one only to continue producing; it cannot affirm the *nature* of the work, nor can it recognize and affirm the personal relation generated in products by the work.

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Ropke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market*, translated by Elizabeth Henderson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 71-72.

## Chapter 2. Meaning-Investing Activity

The meaning generated from meaning-investing activity refers to those features that emerge from human activity that are superadded, intersubjective, and irreducible to the material world. They arise from a distinctive power of the human being that effectively constructs and maintains our social world. This world is the plane on which we appeal to *persons*—as I-You encounters—making judgments and giving reasons and justifications for our behavior. We are, for this reason, not merely acting and reacting beings, but beings that offer *reasons* as justifications for our actions and we in turn call other people to account, with reasons, for their actions.

Since at least Descartes, and especially since Darwin, Western philosophy has been preoccupied with analyzing human existence and the human social world in light of the remarkable explanatory power of modern natural science. The philosophical problems arising from these successes are numerous, including issues concerning free will, human responsibility, ethics, the mind in relation to the brain, etc. Modern evolutionary biologists have relentlessly tried to explain human behavior with evolutionary theory, and in doing so they have compounded the philosophical problems. Evolutionary explanations seem to question the truth of basic judgments of human experience. If, for example, the human enjoyment of music is simply a function of natural selection or some mating advantage, then what do we say about the value or the meaningfulness of the inter-personal *reasons* offered to others for our enjoyment of it and for our preferring this or that music or composition?<sup>10</sup> And what do we say of our reasons for loving another? Only ironically could we say to a lover that our love is pure biology. Why is a house

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<sup>10</sup> On this problem in music, see Roger Scruton, *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (Bloombury, 2016) and Charles Taylor, *Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 239-246.

more than a shelter for self-preservation and survival but also and more importantly a *home*? There seems to be over-determination: our enjoyment of music, our love for particular others, and the home-ness of our house are explained adequately, it would seem, with both evolutionary biology *and* non-scientific reasons offered as justifications; and the latter appears to be irreducible to the former. That is, our non-scientific reasons are not in content grounded in scientific explanation. There are dual explanations, and neither relies on the other and neither uses the same mode or method of analysis. There seems then to be two realms: one of natural science and one of human experience. But are these ordered in some way? Is one primary over the other? Is one true and the other false?

The many solutions offered are, as one could guess, dualistic. They involve ceding the ground claimed by the modern scientists in order to posit an additional mode of understanding the world. Spinoza, for example, while affirming one world, thought that it could be explained in two incommensurable ways—in thought and in extension.<sup>11</sup> Each could exhaustively explain the world, and neither mode of inquiry could reach the other. Kant, responding to Hume's skepticism, argued for a distinction in the understanding, in which one can know both causality and practical reason, the latter being the knowledge of duties and personhood. In these views, however, nothing arises or emerges from the other.

Despite proving unsatisfactory for many philosophers, the dualistic approach is still common. Wilhelm Dilthey's view of *Verstehen* points towards what is, to my mind, a more helpful resolution to the problem;<sup>12</sup> and many subsequent theories, from Wilfrid Sellars to Daniel

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<sup>11</sup> See Roger Scruton, *Spinoza: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences in Selected Works*, ed. R. A. Makkreel and F. Rodi, vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Dennet,<sup>13</sup> reflect Dilthey's influence. *Verstehen* is an interpretative stance towards social phenomena. It is an analysis not seeking to explain human behavior, but to understand it on the basis of the *reasons* offered, the motivating emotions, and the meanings assigned to places and things. As Roger Scruton describes it,

It is a way of conceptualizing the world that emerges from our interpersonal dialogue. It is when addressing you as an *I* like me that I describe the world in terms of the useful, the beautiful, and the good, that I deck out the deliverance of the sense in emotional colors, that I draw your attention to things under such descriptions as graceful, delicate, tragic, and serene. In science, we describe the world *to* others; in *Verstehen* we describe *for* others.<sup>14</sup>

The for-others nature of *Verstehen* is the realm in which we offer reasons to others for our actions and belief. It is not something one can observe and describe when outside the particular intersubjective mode of relations. That is, even if one had a god-like objective view of human beings (assuming a god unable to know the intersubjectivity of humans), this god could exhaust the knowledge only of a certain type, namely, the knowledge of natural science, objective facts, and perhaps evolutionary explanation. Observing mate-selection cannot reach the subjective consideration of love, nor comprehend the nature of the reasons offered for mutual love. The experience of beauty, both natural and human-made, might have its evolutionary explanation, but the experience of beauty is not experienced as a function of natural selection; it is experienced as something wholly different—as something to be contemplated and discussed with others using non-evolutionary and non-scientific terms.

The human social world, however, arises from the natural world, but it is not identical to the natural world. Indeed, it seems that the social realm is incommensurable with the science realm. Sellars and others take this view, labeling one the “space of law” and the other “space of

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Dennet, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Roger Scruton, *Soul of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 33. See also John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Robert Brandom, *Reasons in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

reason.” This follows from his early work in which he famously distinguished the “scientific image” and the “manifest image.”<sup>15</sup> Our everyday mode of existence is within a space of reasons. That is to say, we cannot justify ourselves—our beliefs and actions—by means of mechanistic explanation. Our experience of ourselves and with others always assumes existence in a plane of inter-personal relations that transcends the natural, mechanistic world. By their activity in a world with others, persons construct and impute upon the material world ontologically inter-subjective features upon which we have our social being and by which we communicate with other persons our cares, loves, concerns, longings, rights and responsibilities.

In *The Construction of Social Reality*, John Searle describes the ontology of social facts and explains helpfully how we construct this social world. Searle begins by making a fundamental distinction “between those features of the world that exist independently of us and those that are dependent on us for their existence.”<sup>16</sup> Objects in the world can have both *ontologically objective* features and *ontologically subjective* features, the former referring to features of objects that exist apart from any subject’s attitude or intention relative to it and the latter referring to features that are “observer or user relative.” A screwdriver, he states, has objective and “intrinsic” features (i.e., its material composition); and yet it also has “subjective” or extrinsic features, revealed in its usefulness *as* a screwdriver. This feature of the object exists only due to the “intentionality of observers, user, etc.” He goes on to speak of “social facts,” which make up our social reality, as the products of “collective intentionality.” These “we

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<sup>15</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, “Philosophy and Scientific Image of Man,” in *Science, Perception, and Reality*. Austin: Ridgeview, 1963), pp. 35-78.

<sup>16</sup> John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 9. See also *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and, especially, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

intentions” are individuals intending as part of the collective intending. That is, they are united on particular attitudes towards some object, activity, institution, place, rule, etc.

According to Searle, we have the unique capacity to assign “status functions” on “objects and people” (and I’d add, places) that “cannot perform the functions solely in virtue of their physical structure.” He continues, “The performance of the function requires that there be a collectively recognized status that the person or object has, and it is only in virtue of that status that the person or object can perform the function in question.”<sup>17</sup> His examples include private property, a twenty-dollar bill, and university professors as things that have “a collectively recognized status that enables them to perform those functions.” The object or person can perform some collectively assigned function only on account of its status in the social world. These status functions necessarily come with what Searle calls “deontic powers,” which he identifies as “right, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements, and so on.” And these create “reasons for acting that are independent of our inclinations and desires.”<sup>18</sup>

Searle, to my mind, is on the right track in exploring the principal ways by which human construct and consent to a social world. Humans have a higher-order faculty by which we construct common agreement that imputes function, roles, meanings, etc. to people, things, and places from which arise responsibilities, duties, manners, rules, laws, civil sacrality, and rights. We can assign status functions or features to things that are irreducible even to their assigned use-functions in human activity. We can assign meaning to things (and places) for purely interpersonal ends. These higher-order features make possible the “we-consciousness”—a social life

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<sup>17</sup> Searle, *Making the Social World*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

in which all are constantly acting for, against, with, and in reaction to others in accordance with principles, rules, and reasons.

The activity that establishes and sustains this social world of higher-order features is what I call meaning-investing activity, and my argument is that work can be such an activity to the fullest extent. Meaning-investing activity is any human activity in the world that constructs and maintains our social world of inter-personal relations through places and things in the world, which extends from the mundane to the sacred—viz., from rule-making in places (e.g., quietness in a library) to the establishment of monuments for civic memory and the sacralization of gravesites. All of these involve the imbueing of features on the world unapparent upon scientific analysis. Such features fundamentally call others to respond in particular ways in relation to things and places solely on account of *reasons* offered through or in them. By “reasons,” I refer to any means of persuasion that seeks to convince one to respond solely on account of the goodness of the reasons offered, not due to any physical or psychological coercion — reason alone determines the will. In choosing to participate in various activities in society, we are at least tacitly consenting to the various reasons (or rules) embedded in those contexts and therefore subject ourselves to correction (whether official or unofficial) in the event of our failure to respond appropriately. But being corrected is recognition of one’s personhood—as one who *can* apprehend and choose to follow these inter-personal rules.

Meaning-investing activity has one additional and I think higher effect upon places and things. Human activity in the world can imbue things and places with personal *affection* and significance such that the things and places, to us, take on a value that transcends any use-value and exchange-value. The home/house distinction is again a helpful example. As a site in which

memories seem lodged, a home has an additional value beyond resale value.<sup>19</sup> Family heirlooms is another, which has intergenerational significance. An old chair, on which one's deceased relative sat, takes on significance above and beyond any market value. We relate intimately with things and places on and in which our ancestors acted. Coming upon his father's house and land, Cicero wrote, "We are somehow moved by the places in which the signs of those we love or admire are present."<sup>20</sup>

In our own activity with things and places, we extend an elevating affection and subsequently identify with them, as if our concerns have been lodged in them. This is one of the great insights of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novella *The Little Prince*, in which a prince devotes considerable attention to the growth and care of a flower only to realize that there is objectively nothing special about it. But his fox, which he tamed, says to him: "Go look at the roses again. You'll understand that yours is the only rose in all the world." The Prince goes and observes all the roses, including his own, and says to the roses,

"You're lovely, but you're empty," he went on. "One couldn't die for you. Of course, an ordinary passerby would think my rose looked just like you. But my rose, all on her own, is more important than all of you together, since she's the one I've watered. Since she's the one I put under glass. Since she's the one I sheltered behind a screen. Since she's the one for whom I killed the caterpillars (except the two or three for butterflies). Since she's the one I listened to when she complained, or when she boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing at all. Since she's *my* rose."<sup>21</sup>

His fox then says to him, "One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes....It's the time you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important." The crucial insight here is that an intimate involvement with some thing engenders a unique relation, one that

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<sup>19</sup> See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958]).

<sup>20</sup> Cicero in "On the Laws" in *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*. Edited by James E. G. Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130 [2.4].

<sup>21</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* Translated by Richard Howard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000 [1943]), 143-144.

is irreducible to and indiscernible from its material composition and yet is an unavoidable consequence of devotion to it. What is objectively common or valueless could, for this reason, be subjectively or intersubjectively invaluable.

But this relation is not mere sentimentality. Rather, through such relations of engendered affections, one can assert personality such that respect for the thing by another *eo ipso* recognizes the one who intimately relates to it. In other words, the identification between person and thing, arising from meaning-investing activity, makes the thing an extension of one's personality in the world—as a manifestation of one's self before others. Hence, one respects another's home not merely because it is their property (or at least legally occupied), but because it is a *home*: a site on which a particular people have stamped their right to dwell. At the same time, the home is a place of responsibility: a site from which one fulfills obligations to others for the common good.

Whatever is true of meaning-investing activity, as to its comprehension, is true of meaningful work, for as I will show below meaningful work is meaning-investing activity. In productive labor, workers offer reasons as persons to other persons by means of the products for their labor and its goodness. This is possible because of the person/product relation engendered from the scale of production, which permits both mutual recognition of personhood between producer and consumer, making the work an end in itself, and a judgment that can perfect the work.

### Chapter 3. Meaningful Work

This chapter describes the proximate genus of small-scale production, what I call *meaningful work* (which is also the genus of literary work). In the previous section, I argued that features of our social world are ontologically subjective—being *extrinsic* to the material itself—existing on the surface of the material world as investment, in the form of reasons, duties, obligations, etc. by which we address persons as persons ourselves. All that is comprehensible in meaning-investing activity is comprehensible under meaningful work, i.e., meaningful work is meaning-investing activity. Hence, the characteristics of meaning-investing activity identified above are true of meaningful work. This chapter demonstrates this and discusses what is distinctive of meaningful work itself.

The distinctive features of meaningful work as a genus is that the worker engages in some *productive activity* that forms an intimate attachment to the thing produced such that you, the producer, see yourself in the thing produced—as a thing embodying your personhood as worker. The product with this embodiment is not itself the person, as if persons can recreate themselves into things. Rather the product has become the vehicle through which one asserts personhood before others, demanding recognition by means of the product as one who worked and identifies with it and offering oneself for judgment through it. The products embody reasons—either in words or qualities, as we'll see—offered to another person as a sort of proposal to others for the goodness of one's laboring activity. The consumer's acknowledgment of that higher-order signification and their judgment of those reasons as good completes the work, for the offering of reasons to justify one's activities is always intended for others' acknowledgment and judgment. If products of meaningful work embody reasons on behalf of one's activity, then the consumer—the

acknowledging and judging agent—is essential to the perfection of work. By recognizing not only that the work of another was *intended* for some consumer’s good but actually *realized* the consumer’s good, the consumer recognizes the worker both as a person and as a person who worked well. Meaningful work therefore is productive activity that produces products *by* persons, *for* persons, and *between* persons with higher-order significance by intimate activity with the material in order to perfect work and contribute to the common good.

To illuminate the nature of meaningful work, it will be helpful to discuss *literary work*, which is small-scale production’s fellow species in the genus. The features that they share are more obvious in literary work than small-scale production, and I assume that my audience is more familiar with literary work.

Literary work expresses meaningful work in its chief products, published writings. Each person’s published work is set apart from others as being in some sense “*mine*,” even when the writer no longer has the right of use or distribution. When one writes a book, receives it, and puts it on one’s bookshelf, it is not just another book among books; it is the *author’s* book. It embodies thought, time, devotion, and consideration, not only on truth but conveying truth *to* the reader. It is *for* the reader; the reader was ever in mind. Having placed one’s name on it, the author declares responsibility for the content. On the shelf, it represents the author’s contribution to a world of persons. It embodies time spent and life exerted, and it recalls to mind even the place(s) at which it was written and perhaps circumstances of life as well. Most important, it embodies an earnest appeal to be taken seriously, to be read, and *to be judged*.

Though criticism or judgment principally concerns the book’s content, the ultimate object is the author. Reviewers speak of the *author’s* thoughts and knowledge, not the thoughts

themselves. And yet the written thoughts and thinker who produced them could or typically should be separated. Book reviews are rather strange in this regard and helpful to reveal the nature of meaningful work. The judgment of a work is rightly on its content or material, but because one cannot separate the content from its producer without losing something important (and that *something* is what I'm trying to reveal), the judgment is concurrently and even principally on the *producer* of the content. After all, the author does not say "this is *my* truth," but rather "I say this is true," and yet we do not disconnect the author from that claim of truth. Though truth is (presumably) independent of the claimer, it is presented as a truth-claim and is judged as such. To judge the truth-claim is to judge a person as claimant of truth.

This is explained by the fact that we write to communicate ideas in order to participate in a community of thought; and this community is between persons, each making appeals concerning truth to other persons. In affirming or denying someone's truth-claim, one assumes already that the author is one who can make claims, namely a person—one who can say "I think." Saying "*I* disagree with *you*" is an I-you encounter by which one affirms the other's equal personhood and one's right and ability to make truth-claims (though one might still be superior in knowledge on the point at issue). The thought, true or false, facilitates the recognition of mutual personhood.

But of course those making the claims want others to agree. The proposed truth is accompanied by an appeal: if true, then it ought to be a common judgment of truth. You are satisfied when another agrees with your claims only if they earnestly considered them, but not when they agree thoughtlessly. The producer wants a worthy judgment, especially from one whom the author respects. This satisfies the author as a contributor to the good of the collection of persons composing the community of thought. Even in rejection, however, there is a sort of

contribution: what is *not* true helps to narrow towards what is true. Of course, rejection is not very satisfying. But it is more satisfying than in those too-frequent cases when one's work is never judged or receives little attention. In these cases, one's aspirations to be a person among persons by means of thought are never recognized, either through affirmation or denial. Despite the work being complete, one's work or labor is left empty. The book on the shelf becomes an embodiment of false hope, wasted time, life exhausted without recognition and rejuvenation.

As I said, literary labor and small-scale production are two species of this genus, and therefore essentially different, which means that there is a principle of difference between them, each possessing a specific difference.<sup>22</sup> The products of artisanship do not communicate personhood through ordinary language and, for this reason, cannot contain an explicit or implicit "I" with a clear referent. Personhood is concealed and communicated outside ordinary language, using significations of *quality*, making such communication more difficult and in need of a close community. A theorist of craftsmanship,<sup>23</sup> Peter Korn, who is an artisan himself, recognizes these similarities and differences:

In many ways, the coffee table in my living room and the desk at which I sit are like the book that you are reading. Each came into being through creative process in which I explored ideas about life. When I am making furniture, I think with things; when I am writing I think with words. Both methodologies are powerful tools....Although both furniture and books carry ideas, there are significant differences between them, such as how they sequence information....A craftsman cannot control a respondent's path through this information as tightly as an author, but the craftsman has the advantage of making complex structures of information simultaneously apparent. His picture is worth the proverbial thousand words.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One might think of the principle of difference as the ground or basis for the difference in species and the specific difference as the consequence of applying the principle.

<sup>23</sup> My standard term for small-scale non-farming labor is "artisanship" and "artisan." Many theorists of craft, however, have used "craftsman," "craftsmanship," and "workmanship." When discussing their work, I have chosen to use their terminology. They are synonymous in this essay.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Korn, *Why We Create Things and Why it Matter* (Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine, 2013) 63, 64.

The principle of difference between artisanal and literary work appears to be the *mode* of communication—the specific differences consequentially being the signification of thoughts with *words* for sequential consideration (literary work) and thoughts with *qualities*<sup>25</sup> for immediate, simultaneous consideration (small-scale production). Despite their differences, however, the experience of work in literary work serves as an experiential foundation for understanding small-scale production.

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<sup>25</sup> These qualities include capacities, sensible (or passive) qualities, form and figure, all of which admit of degree.

## Chapter 4. Small-Scale Production

Small-scale production is meaningful work because all that is comprehensible (as to conceptual content) of meaningful work is true of small-scale production. I provide little discussion on its extension (i.e., on the range of concrete productive activities to which it applies).<sup>26</sup> I discuss artisanship in detail in this essay (see chapter V) not because meaningful small-scale production applies only to artisanship but because such work is a useful synecdoche for a description of meaningful small-scale production. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to discuss non-industrial land-based production, or small-scale farming. Being a sort of subspecies with artisanship, small-scale farming work reveals in part the nature and possibilities of artisanship.

“He’ll think he owns it.”

We begin with a fictional account given by the novelist John Steinbeck. In his *Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck frequently describes farmers’ relationship to land and the product of labor. For example, he writes the following:

The tenant [farmer] pondered. ‘Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it’s part of him, and it’s like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn’t doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he’s bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn’t successful he’s big with his property. That is so.’<sup>27</sup>

The land is “part of” the farmer. His emotions are tied to it. His being is bound up in it. In his work on the land, he has made an image of himself. It is “like” him, and in effect “the property is him.” The need for sustenance does not fully explain this intimate connection. The farmer cares for the property not merely on account of its productive capacity and his potential of acquiring wealth. The farmer/property link is analogous to a parental/child relationship: the parent *feels*

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<sup>26</sup> See Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) for a recent discussion on different types of craft.

<sup>27</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ch. 5.

when the child feels, and parents even *want* to feel with the child. This work on the soil has generated a relation constituted by an extension, through labor, of self-concern and self-regard to land.

Later in the narrative, Steinbeck writes of desperate and propertyless small farmers cultivating “secret gardens” on uncultivated land owned by another. A sheriff comes along and says to them, “I had my eye on you. This ain’t your land. You’re trespassing.” The man responds to the sheriff, “The land ain’t plowed, an’ I ain’t hurtin’ it none.” The sheriff replies, “You goddamned squatters. Pretty soon you’d think you owned it. You’d be sore as hell. Think you owned it. Get off now.” The narrative continues:

And the little green carrot tops were kicked off and the turnip greens trampled. And then the Jimson weed moved back in. But the cop was right. A crop raised—why, that makes ownership. Land hoed and the carrots eaten—a man might fight for land he’s taken food from. Get him off quick! He’ll think he owns it. He might even die fighting for the little plot among the Jimson weeds. Did ya see his face when we kicked them turnips out? Why, he’d kill a fella soon’s he’d look at him. We got to keep these here people down or they’ll take the country. They’ll take the country. Outlanders, foreigners.<sup>28</sup>

Much could be said about this passage, but one point in particular is most relevant here. The chief offense was not the destruction of sustenance. Nor was the cop most concerned with the food itself. Rather it was about the cultivated land—land that one has “taken food from.” Arising from cultivation is a sense of ownership, a sense of “mine”—a claim that is not in itself and originally a legal claim to property but something extra-legal. It follows the ancient principle, codified by Cicero, that the place that each one occupies is his own.<sup>29</sup> As Pierre Proudhon wrote, the occupation of land is “a place possessed, not a place appropriated,” which works to

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<sup>28</sup> Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ch. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Cicero, *De Finibus*, translated by Harris Rackham (Loeb, 1931), Book III.20 “But just as, though the theatre is a public place, yet it is correct to say that the particular seat a man has taken belongs to him, so in the state or in the universe, though these are common to all, no principle of justice militates against the possession of private property.”

“annihilate [legal] property.”<sup>30</sup> The cop and the desperate farmer knew that something unique had been generated between the worker and *this* spot. Trampling over crops was, for this reason, more than material destruction; it was an attack on the farmer himself. He had no legal right to the land he cultivated—a right that would be backed by a third-party, the state. He nevertheless can feel, and perhaps assert, an extra-legal claim to the product and perhaps even to the land—a claim backed by the worker himself who stands out from the boundary with strength and resolve intent on conserving his own as an act of *self*-preservation. The cop knew that if such activity continues, “they’ll take the country.”

There is an unmistakable Lockean theme present in the narrative, though Steinbeck takes it a step further. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke argued that something becomes one’s property after “he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own.” In addition to “mixed” and “joined,” he uses the words “annexed” and “added” for things that ground a property right.<sup>31</sup> But these terms seem to be metaphorical. After all, productive labor is not a *thing* that one mixes with material. It is an activity. Locke employs nothing literal or empirical to account for this “mixing.” And indeed there is nothing empirical or material about the relationship generated in production. The body is not joined to the soil. As metaphorical, there must be a *literal* referent, something that remains hidden or unstated in Locke’s exposition. Locke seems to be missing a necessary connecting element between labor and property. Property ownership is a *legal claim*—something backed by law, a human artifice, against another. But if people have an extra-legal claim to the soil and material on which they’ve labored, then what is the ground of that claim?

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<sup>30</sup> Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, Translated by Benjamin Tucker (Humboldt Publishing Company 1890), II.2.

<sup>31</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, II.5.

The mediating element that can ground property-claims is the same connection between worker and product or soil that this essay seeks to describe. It is an extension of concern and care imputed to the thing by the thing's creator, arising from the time, energy, thought, care, and life put into it. Locke's view of property, as interpreted by Steinbeck, contains an unstated premise, namely, that a phenomenological relation arises between worker and the products of the worker's labor due to the activity performed on it. The person as worker has extended some sense of self to the soil, elevating it from something foreign to familiar. In Steinbeck narrative, the farmer's personality manifests from the soil such that an outside offense against the land is an offense against the man himself; and moreover the very act of cultivating, reaping, and consuming generates an extra-legal sense of "mine" so strong that it might even challenge a legal and arbitrary claim to property.

This discussion of Locke is not meant to provide novel insight into his account of property; indeed, it is unlikely that Locke had any phenomenological producer/product relation in mind.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, his account, though used later to justify the liberal economic order, does seem to support the assumptions of Steinbeck's narration. In justifying property acquisition beyond mere "universal consent," as seen in Grotius and Pufendorf, and in grounding property in some relation between the person, activity, and product, the Steinbeckian Locke suggests that such property-claims are *mediated* by something prior and unstated in Locke, namely some extra-legal phenomenological connection. The importance for us is not in a possible phenomenological grounding of legal property. Rather the point is that productive activity can generate a deep-seated, extra-legal connection that motivates one to stand in its defense, as if in

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<sup>32</sup> For this reason, my discussion of Locke is not intended to challenge individualist interpretations of Locke, such as C. B. MacPherson's "possessive individualism." See his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

*self*-defense, not by appealing to some third party (e.g., the state) to secure the claim, but by one's own independent self-assertion for it before others, demanding recognition as if the product is an extension of oneself.

### Labor as an Extension of Life

Moving away from small-scale farming, we will now discuss some of Karl Marx's early thought. In much of Marx's analysis he has large-scale operations in mind, but his description of labor reveals the possibility of extending "life" into one's products, an important element in my account of meaningful work. But more importantly a discussion and critique of Marx allows us to clarify, by rejecting some of Marx's ideas, the importance of the *mode* of labor—the particular type of concrete labor—in the possibility of work as an end in itself.

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, written before *Das Kapital*, Marx writes a fascinating chapter on "Estranged Labour."<sup>33</sup> Seemingly borrowing from Locke, he states that "the product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification." For Marx, this objectification does not produce property, at least not for the producer. Of course, in the capitalist mode of production, the product is immediately the property of the capitalist. But products in general and in themselves are labor embodied, a sort of public manifestation of labor. The "worker put his life in the object," he writes. The product then is alien to the worker because it is an objectification of life-expenditure: "Whatever the product of his labor is, he is not." For Marx, productive labor produces a unique relationship between producer and product: the product is an "external existence" of one's "inner world." The producer gives or transfers life into the product and "now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object."

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<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 106-119.

Marx is using metaphorical language. “Life” refers not merely to the “expenditure of brains, nerves, and muscles.” It refers in addition to an extension of self, an extension that involves a loss of more than bodily energy. In the expenditure of life, the worker suffers a “loss of realization.” By extending one’s aspirations out into things that pass one by on the assembly line and are brought into an impersonal social relation of production, one loses oneself in the world of things.

For Marx, the liberal economic order concealed reality—the reality that workers worked *directly* for one another, not for things. The *real* social relations of production are between fellow workers. But the market exchange concealed this reciprocal relationship. Workers falsely thought that their labor was for things; labor was only the means to a wage—a mere means. But for Marx, the expenditure of labor-power is the mutual person-to-person giving of life—an activity ultimately oriented towards persons, who are ends in themselves. Labor was actually an act of rejuvenation for another: the mutual giving of life. One gives of one's inner world and another gives in return; it is a mutual for-others activity. The true relation of production was ultimately a relation of *reciprocation between persons*. And when capitalism falls, the veil will be stripped away and this relation will finally be explicit in the world.

If Marx is correct, then meaningful work is possible in both large-scale and small-scale production, making the sort of “petty-bourgeois” artisanship, which he dismissed in his *Communist Manifesto* as nostalgia, unnecessary.<sup>34</sup> There is however a widely acknowledged and serious problem in classical Marxism. But that problem helps reveal the possibilities of meaningful work in small-scale production. I show this below.

First however I want to explain why this is important for the argument. In part, I want to salvage Marx’s account of labor as a person-to-person mutual giving of life by demonstrating its

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<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* III.1.B.

possibility in small-scale production. Workers can expend life for another, even with the fall of Marxian economics, but only in certain conditions. The inability for people to work for one another is not due to false consciousness, nor to the fetishization of produced things. Rather what is essential is the nature of the work itself—that it is meaning-investing activity. And the product itself, when made in a particular way, is what facilitates the very life-to-life rejuvenation Marx speaks of. Personal relations of production is not between laborers viewed as conducting “abstract labor.” Rather persons work for one another by means of *particular* labor-activities in community; and the resulting product is the vehicle of that appeal.

Relying on the Labor Theory of Value, Marx argued that the capitalist economic system conceals from workers the fact that they ultimately “work for one another,” as I said above.<sup>35</sup> He reached this conclusion by following the liberal economic theory of the time (particularly David Ricardo’s economic theories). With Adam Smith, he believed that the true value of a product is not tied to its use-value or its exchange value, but by the amount of labor-power expended to make it: the “productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscle.” This is “abstract labor” or the “expenditure of labor power in general,” labor without reference to any particular mode of production (i.e., “concrete labor”). When the products of labor reach the exchange, they take on an exchange value equivalent to the “socially necessary labor” time put into them. For example, if some linen took one hour to weave and a coat took two hours to tailor, the exchange ratio would be 2 to 1. The “price” of a coat is two units of linen. There is nothing unique about this formulation; it is standard classical economics.<sup>36</sup> But where Marx takes this is innovative. He argues that the market exchange *conceals* what is actually going on in the act of exchange. It

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<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), 82.

<sup>36</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Ch. 5.

creates a system of relations between things, yet these things are merely the products of abstract labor. He writes,

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total to their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour... There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.<sup>37</sup>

Underlying the exchange value, and that which the exchange conceals, is the labor-power exerted to make the products. For Marx, the end of work is not the product; it is the other worker. For this reason, the seed of communism is already contained in the liberal order: the workers already work for one another. It is, however, concealed by their obsession with things. The “fetishism which attaches itself to the product of labour”<sup>38</sup> is made possible by the “mist-enveloped” arena of the exchange, bringing about the “estrangement of man from man.”<sup>39</sup>

For Marx, when workers mature from a class in-itself to a class for-itself, it will overthrow the unnecessary and exploitive capitalist apparatus—such as property, the market exchange, and the capitalist class—and continue, for the most part, what they were already doing, viz. working for one another with the same jobs in the same factories. The communist revolution simply unveils the true nature of things. Once the capitalists are removed, the human species proceeds into the next stage of social development.

Since workers ultimately work for one another in a classical Marxian system, work is directed toward a proper end, namely, *persons*, and in so doing they reciprocate life and the mutual affirmation of each other as ends in themselves. In liberal economies, workers expend life

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<sup>37</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 114.

to make an object that is bought to the market. Their work and their relationships to others as workers are only means to something else. The termination of ownership in the exchange under capitalism does not serve, on Marx's account, to rejuvenate or restore the life one put into the product. The worker in this system works only to eat and eats only to work. By dispensing with the fetishism, workers discover the true nature of their work, namely, that it has a real and worthy end, others persons.

But Marx's reliance on classical economics proves to be problematic for Marxian economic theory. The Labor Theory of Value, which was integral to Smith's and many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century economists' theories, is largely rejected today and it came under fatal attack soon after Marx's death. Reflecting a general consensus today, Economist Thomas Sowell writes,

By the late nineteenth century, however, economists had given up the notion that it is primarily labor which determines the value of good, since capital, management and natural resources all contribute to output and must be paid for from the price of that output, if these inputs in the production process are to continue to be supplied. More fundamentally, labor, like all other sources of production costs, was no longer seen as a source of value. On the contrary, it was the value of the goods to the consumers which made it worthwhile to incur the costs required to produce those good—provided that the consumer was willing to pay enough to cover those production costs....It is not costs which create value; it is value which causes purchasers to be willing to pay for the costs incurred in the production of what they want.<sup>40</sup>

Production cost is no longer the source of value in the market. The cost of labor is one important factor in decisions concerning production, but it has little to no direct bearing upon the *price* at exchange. It does not determine price.

This has serious consequences for classical Marxian economic theory. While liberal economic theory could modify itself in light of this development, the Marxian account, which so stressed the concealed relations of production between workers, suffered a fatal blow, in my view. *There is no underlying relations of production based on abstract labor.* Workers do not

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Basic Economics: A Common Sense Guide to the Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) 286-287.

work for one another as Marx argued. The market exchange does not conceal social relations. Workers do not project their ideals upon products and thereby avoid some higher level of species-being. There is no seed of communism in the liberal economic order.

But as I've suggested above, this failure of classical Marxism does not require us to leave behind the idea of labor as an activity for others—as an activity ultimately between persons and as an activity that expends and extends life. It was after all the French polymath Jean Charles Leonard de Sismondi (1773-1842), whom Marx identified in his *Manifesto* the great defender of the petite bourgeoisie, who was one of the first to identify the “social labour” inherent in production. He called attention to the “reciprocal cares and duties” that bind people together in small-scale production.<sup>41</sup> Turning Marx on his head, my argument shows that it is actually through the relation between products (or “things) that we work for one another, for products can be, when produced in the small-scale, reasons-bearing things through which we recognize the reason-givers.

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<sup>41</sup> See Jean Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, *Political Economy and the Philosophy of Government; A Series of Essays selected from the Works of M. de Sismondi*. (London: John Chapman, 1847).

## Chapter 5. The Meaning in Artisanry

The discussion now turns to the meaningful work of artisanry. In artisanry, one generally uses tools and machines in the service of the *worker's* production. In large-scale production, however, laborers generally service the machine in *its* production. Though both types of work require skill, meaningful work requires that the worker's relation to tools and machines does not preclude or obscure the worker's acting with intention upon the material. Hannah Arendt provides a helpful distinction: in industrial capitalism "it is no longer the body's movement that determines the implement's movement but the machine's movement which enforces the movements of the body."<sup>42</sup> In serving machines, there is no need for a mental image of the finished product; one does not intend upon the material in the process of it becoming a product. The focus of the laborer in this setting is not the product at all; rather the laborer's attention is on the machine that makes it. There is often little mastery required, only habituation into a mindless, rote activity.<sup>43</sup>

Another distinguishing mark is the immediate application of artisanal skills to a product. That is, the application of skill acquired by direct experience with material, exercised with independence and free agency. Traditional craftsmen of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "worked at the pace which their craftsmanship demanded," states historian E. P. Thompson.<sup>44</sup> They followed the "mystery" of their trade, rooted in "customary traditions of craftsmanship."<sup>45</sup> They served the

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 146.

<sup>43</sup> Many, for this reason, "prefer [repetitive labor] because it is mechanical and does not demand attention, so that while performing it they can think of something else," says Arendt. *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>44</sup> E. P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966 [1963]), 236.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 253, 236.

community and knew the material they formed. George Stuart, in his *Wheelwright's Shop*, a celebrated account of his wheelwright trade published in 1923, wrote,

In them was stored all the local lore of what good wheelwright's work should be like. The century-old tradition was still vigorous in them. They knew each customer and his needs; understood his carters and his horses and the nature of his land; and finally took a pride in providing exactly what was wanted in every case. So, unawares, they lived as integral parts in the rural community of the English. Overworked and underpaid, they none the less enjoyed life, I am sure. They were friends, as only a craftsman can be, with timber and iron. The grain of wood told secrets to them.<sup>46</sup>

The “secrets” of the material was “real knowledge” communicated and learned only through hands-on experience with the material. It is the “practical knowledge” or *mētis*, as James C. Scott has labeled it—the sort of knowledge that “resists simplification into deductive principles which can successfully be transmitted through book learning” and is essentially “knowing how and when to apply the rules of thumb [of a craft] *in a concrete situation*.”<sup>47</sup> Far from binding one to a rigid tradition, *mētis* is “plastic, local and divergent,” for practical knowledge is a sort of cunning relation to the unexpectedness of the material and the productive process and changing local needs.

In experience, an artisan is one with the tools and thereby is united with the material in the act of shaping and forming as one continuously imposes one's will in and for it. In such activity, one has annexed oneself to the material. That is to say, the one acting, the tools being used, and the material being acted upon, are effectively united in the worker's experience. This is not magic or mysticism. Rather I'm describing the way in which practical knowledge in production brings the material into an intimate relation in experience with the one working it. In concerted and concentrated effort, using judgment and deliberation—as if acting and reacting

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<sup>46</sup> George Stuart, *Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 54-5.

<sup>47</sup> Jame C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, 315-16.

with good manners and subtlety to the complexities and irregularities of the material, making choices and taking risks—there arises a relationship between person and product, adorning that product with a superadded, immaterial meaning that is intersubjectively recognizable.

Peter Korn helpfully discusses meaning in artisanship.

When we say an object has meaning...we are measuring its emotional importance to a respondent....Some of the most common ways in which a craft object attains meaning for a respondent are through information coded into the object by the maker; through the experience of discovering or acquiring the object; through a personal connection with the maker; and through provenance or projection....However it happens, objects ultimately possess meaning to the extent they affect or confirm the stories through which a respondent constructs his identity and orders his world.<sup>48</sup>

As Richard Sennett states in a discussion of pottery and brickmaking in *The Craftsman*, there is a human tendency to “become particularly interested in the things we can change,” a tendency that he calls “material consciousness.”<sup>49</sup>

In *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*,<sup>50</sup> David Pye defines “craftsmanship” as “any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on the judgment, dexterity and care which the maker exercises as he works.” Craftsmanship is “workmanship of risk,” as opposed to “workmanship of certainty” (which characterizes modern industrial labor). There is risk in craftsmanship because the outcome is uncertain, for such work is continuously an “approximation” toward the end.<sup>51</sup> But this risk of failure is a necessary consequence (and perhaps motivating factor) of craftsmanship. Since the craftsman “intends” qualities for the product, the product manifests the craftsman’s agency in the product’s creation. Pye writes, “Thus the quality of workmanship is judged [in both soundness

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<sup>48</sup> Korn, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Sennett, *The Craftsmen*, 120.

<sup>50</sup> David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Bethel, CT: Cambium Press, 1971), 120.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

and comeliness] by reference to the designer's intention.....Good workmanship is that which carries out or improves upon the intended design.”

Workmanship of certainty, however, relies necessarily on predetermined quality and products produced simply *ex opere operato*; and as a result, the worker cannot identify with the qualities of the product.<sup>52</sup> In service to a machine, this worker intended indirectly to make the product, but the worker has not intended anything particular about it. The worker bears no responsibility for any particular quality. Responsibility comes by applying “judgment, dexterity, and care” in production.

When following a design, the worker is an “interpreter” and thereby still doing workmanship of risk. This interpretive work is like a judge seeking to understand a statute instituted by a legislature or like a pianist interpreting a musical composition, for the “eye and mind can discriminate things which can never be specified or dimensioned.”<sup>53</sup> Intending the design is sufficient to gain responsibility for the quality of the resulting product. The product discloses itself to the worker as an embodiment of the worker's intentions and, in consequence, the worker identifies with it as an objectification of labor and subsequently assumes responsibility for it.

Marx in his *Manuscripts* describes the objectification of the worker in the products of labor. What distinguishes humans from animals is the human ability to “confront” the product of one's labor. Non-human animals cannot distinguish “life activity,” including productive activity,

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<sup>52</sup> Fredrick Winslow Taylor, the theoretician of “scientific management,” instructed factory owners to make “all possible brain work...centered in the planning and laying-out department” and “remove” it from the “shop.” As Matthew Crawford rightfully comments, “Once the cognitive aspects of the job are located in a separate management class...[the job] requires no ongoing judgment or deliberation.” See Matthew Crawford *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 39.

<sup>53</sup> Pye, 55.

from itself: “it is its life activity.”<sup>54</sup> Humans have “conscious life” from which “man freely confronts his product.” Marx continues:

It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man first really proves himself to be a *species being*. This production is his active species life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man’s species life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created.<sup>55</sup>

Humans create a *human* world that is an objectification of labor, taking on a distinctive character “in accordance with the laws of beauty” that humans can contemplate and gaze upon as if a mirror from which reflects their species being. Since “labor is...the objectification of man’s species life” it is, or can be, an end in itself, for by it humans fulfill distinctively *human* features—their difference of species, namely, rational activity towards the human *telos*. But when the object of one’s production is torn away, this “species life [becomes] a means,” not an end in itself. As we’ve already shown, Marx incorrectly saw this potential in *all* labor. Only a particular type of labor makes this possible—that of the small-scale producer. The fact that the producer is a human being is not itself sufficient for human objectification in the product. Still, Marx recognizes something important, namely, that workers can produce products as objectifications of labor that serve as the means for workers to contemplate themselves as workers.

Relying on these accounts of work, we can further explicate the nature of artisanship. Upon the termination of labor, a product of work is the objectification of one’s labor and, in consequence, is a potential object to contemplate the goodness of the laboring activity. At this point in the productive process the product is potentially a social product, meaning that it has the

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<sup>54</sup> *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 113.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

potential to serve as a vehicle through which others recognize the producer. It has not yet entered the social world through an exchange, nor is it available for others' consideration. Still, such products meet the conditions to become a social product that facilitates inter-personal relations. In other words, since one recognizes oneself in and is bound up with the product due to the type of laboring activity put into it, the product possesses the potential to extend the laborer into the public by it. This potential is the first necessary condition of labor as an end in itself.

Having one's aspirations and intentions bound up in these things, producers desire to make them public—to manifest themselves to the world through them. As Alexandre Kojève writes, the worker “recognizes his own product in the World that has actually been transformed by his work: he recognizes himself in it, he sees in it his own human reality, in it he discovers and reveals to others the objective reality of his humanity.”<sup>56</sup> Being the sole contemplator of one's own work is not enough. Matthew Crawford, a trained philosopher-turned motorcycle mechanic, writes that an artisan wants “to see them [i.e., his products] in use; this completes my activity of making them, and gives it social reality. It makes me feel I have contributed to the common good.”<sup>57</sup> This objectified labor, or the public manifestation of the person as worker, has a “social currency,” says Crawford, for “the effects of my work were visible for all to see, so my competence was real for others as well.”<sup>58</sup> Following Kojève, he argues that small-scale work, both in the creation of new things and in repairing old things, “manifest[s] oneself concretely in the world” and *good* work provides “satisfaction,” for the worker “can simply point: the building

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<sup>56</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 186.

<sup>58</sup> Crawford, 14.

stands, the car now runs, the lights are on....The tradesman must reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be interpreted away."<sup>59</sup>

This satisfaction necessarily requires the judgment of others in reference to the producer by means of the product's qualities, an act made possible by the embodiment of a person's concrete work in the product. In this way, judgment is directed not toward *this* product, but toward this *worker's* product. Consequently, the work is completed as an end in itself, for in judgment a person is firstly recognized by persons as a person who worked, and secondly, if the judgment is positive, one is recognized as a person whose work was good and for the good of others. Hence, the work affirmed oneself as a person and others as persons and thereby was worth doing for its own sake. For any activity performed for the affirmation of personhood is worth doing for its own sake. Before discussing judgment further, I must further describe the features that make judgment possible.

There are objective and subjective features of all products of labor. The objective features refer to what is intrinsic to the product—the form and material. These are intrinsic features, because they concern what is true of it apart from any human relation to it. The subjective features, however, are extrinsic to the products, for the ground of such features are the way or ways that humans relate to their form and material. That is, such features are realized by a relation with something outside it and hence can be lost when that relation is eliminated. These are the efficient and final causes of the products. The final causes are generated by the efficient cause, and in this case the nature of the efficient cause—being a human worker *and* working in a particular mode—determines the possibilities of the resulting final causes in the product.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>60</sup> This use of Aristotle's four causes here assumes only what is plainly true in productive activity, namely, as Henry B. Veatch says of the causes, that "any change must be the change of

Since the mode of activity in the efficient cause can vary and the mode of activity establishes the possibilities of the imposition of ends upon the material, not all modes of labor can generate all possible features. Some modes can generate more and higher-order features than others. In this account of meaningful labor, therefore, the efficient cause takes on crucial importance, for the producer is not merely a creator but a *sustainer* of the relation. The efficient cause is an active cause. Indeed, the difference between the two types of labor is a matter of whether the agent of creation becomes a sustainer of what the product is in its totality upon completion of it and upon exchange. Let's proceed in describing these features in detail.

The lower-order set of features arise from the shaping and forming of material into some thing relevant for human use, so that, upon encountering it, people relate to it not only as a *kind* of thing but a thing *for* something. That is, they relate to it as an object not merely present but also ready for use or as gear for our various activities. The products at this level of inquiry have therefore both intrinsic features, such as its material and form, and extrinsic (or intersubjective) features pertaining to the product's function or use in human activity. These features do not require any sustained relation between producer and product, for the use of any product requires only the recognition that it is useful. Furthermore, the scale of production is irrelevant to the realization of this set of ends in the product. A chair is for sitting and can be recognized for such activity regardless of whether it was made by hand in a shop by a skilled artisan or by a machine in a factory. This is the level of *use* and market value—like a house that one occupies without reference to or consideration of it as a home. It is simply a house among houses. These features

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something (material cause) from something (privation) to something else (formal cause), the change being necessarily effected by some agent (efficient cause) whose action may be presumed to be of a characteristic sort and productive of a characteristic result (final cause).” See *Aristotle* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 49. What should be controversial in my account is not the use of Aristotle's final cause but what I identify as the possible final causes in craftsmanship (e.g., personal ends), which I describe below.

are what *constitute* these objects as human things. Two chairs, one factory-produced and the other by an artisan, have overlapping (though not entirely the same, as we'll see) final causes: they are both for sitting. Both disclose themselves to humans as *for* sitting, regardless of the mode of their production.<sup>61</sup>

When only these extrinsic features are possible, given the mode of labor, the worker relates to the product as something only with use-value and exchange-value, having no further relation to it. This is the relationship of the large-scale worker to the products of large-scale work. They are disclosed as things useful and perhaps represent the efforts exerted to receive a wage. But the relationship does not extend beyond this. Since the products lack any feature transcending right of use, the producer's relationship to the products ceases at the act of exchange (or upon the termination of labor-activity in the case of wage-labor), which results in the complete separation of the producer from the product. Indeed, the worker has no concern in principle as to whether the product is sold and used, either properly or improperly, or directly thrown in the trash. The laborer is concerned only with the achievement of the sale, being bound up with the success of the product on the market only because success in the market ensures wages or revenue. This makes such labor only a means to an end.

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<sup>61</sup> Sismondi discusses the two modes of production: "Whenever great capitals are united, and a great workshop rises up, and different sorts of work are accelerated and concentrated under the same management, so that from the same edifice, the same factory, may be given out cloth made of what was, four and twenty hours before, a fleece on the back of a living sheep, the chresmatic school utters cheering cries of admiration, it extols to the clouds the prosperity of a country where one man can every day load a vessel with cloths, or hardware, or earthenware, sufficient for many thousands of his fellow men; but what a strange forgetfulness of human kind never to inquire what becomes of the man which the great factory has displaced! For, in short, all the consumers which it furnishes were not before without clothes, nor without tools, nor without earthenware; but they provided themselves from those hundreds of little tradesmen who formerly lived happy in independence, and who have disappeared to make room for one millionaire in the mercantile world." *Political Economy*, Accessed 4/17/2017 at [https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1963#Sismondi\\_1287\\_263](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1963#Sismondi_1287_263).

These second and higher-order set of extrinsic features arise in small-scale labor by elevating labor into personal relations, making the productive activity worth doing for its own sake. These features arise in an analogous way to how rights arise from our own sense of self, as claimants of our own self-hood in relation to our activities in the world. In creating something new by deliberate and free action for some human end, the person as worker identifies with it as a manifestation or objectification of oneself and consequently imputes to the product further personal ends—*ends directed by means of the product towards other persons*—and thereby adds to the product’s final cause. In relating to a product as an embodiment of our person *qua* worker, we consequentially assert claims upon others through it.

But these claims are not property-claims. They are not claims for the right to use, nor for the possession of these products. They are what I’ll call phenomenological claims, being extra-legal and pre-political. That is to say, these products disclose themselves to workers not according to *meum et teum*, but rather as *meum et pro bono vestro*. It is mine and for your good. The aim is for something higher than domination or acquisition. It is a claim concerning oneself with regard to the qualities of the product—for others to witness and attest to in their use. And since the claim is bound up in a manifestation of personhood, it is ultimately the assertion of a *right*, not to possession, but to affirmation and judgment. For this reason, whether the product is another person’s property is irrelevant to the phenomenological claim. As Marcel Mauss said of gifts, “the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them.”<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, these are not absolute claims, demanding only one sort of response—affirmation. Rather they are relative claims as appeals to others for their evaluation and confirmation—for their judgment, and not an uncritical one. We assert the goodness of the

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<sup>62</sup> Mauss, Marcel. 1990 (1922). *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. (London: Routledge, 1990 [1922]), 31.

products and its goodness for others and with anticipation of their judgment. And in the assertion we appeal to the other as *a person with the faculty of judgment*; and we expect to be judged as a person. But the objects of that judgment are the *reasons* offered by the person on behalf of one's work, for as I've said a human person is one who offers *reasons* or justifications for one's activity. The reasons or justifications offered in the case of persons *qua* workers are the qualities of the product deliberately imposed upon its material by the person's efforts. Such qualities are the direct objects of one's judgment, serving both as the ground of the product's valuation and, most importantly, as the vehicle or medium through which persons judge the goodness of the person *qua* worker.

The recognition of persons as workers seems to require the proper use and respect for the product; for if the phenomenological claim endures past the exchange, then the extent of the right of use is delimited (at least ethically, if not by law) by the enduring claim of the worker. The product is after all an objectification of the worker's person as laborer. Like the farmer's anger in the spoiling of his small crop, the ill-treatment of products is ill-treatment of the producer. In treating the product well, the consumer or owner recognizes it as the manifestation of another person *as* worker, which *eo ipso* recognizes the person who produced it. For this reason, while the phenomenological claim does not demand a right of use, it does demand that others use the product *well*.

By bringing one's product, and with it *oneself* as laborer, to the realm of judgment and by others receiving that product into the realm of judgment, both the producer and consumer affirm each other as persons, for only persons have the faculty of judgment. It's a mutual giving-of-oneself: one asserts goodness for judgment and one evaluates as judge. The very openness for judgment, which occurs prior to the act of judgment, affirms the personhood of others.

In this openness, the producer recognizes one's social nature, both with a relative (not absolute) deference to the judgment of community and as a possible shaper of its common judgment—or the *sensus communis*. The producer takes into account the judgment of others in order to avoid, as Kant says in a slightly different context, “the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective, an illusion that would exert a prejudicial influence upon its judgment.”<sup>63</sup> The producer asserts reasons into the community, by means of the qualities of the product, for evaluation by collective public reason. Just as we go about the world asserting ourselves in this or that way in our various activities in the social world, testing ourselves for, with, and against others in order to adjust our being in the world as co-participants in the world, so too do we with the products of our labor. This openness expresses both a willingness to modify one’s work in light of judgment and an aspiration to shape consensus. It is governed by the ongoing question, “how is my laboring going?” The intent is the pursuit of perfection as one continues to shape and react to social consensus. At the same time, meaningful work is not simply a matter of reaction and conforming to others’ judgment, nor is it a defiant and oppositional statement of “I exist!” that elevates labor into a sort of “politics of presence,” which ultimately is rejected by the community as anti-social. Rather it is the yearning for positive participation in *shaping* social judgment and belonging.

The need for common agreement does not preclude a bold and confident assertion of quality, nor does it require a blind acceptance of the community’s evaluation. This yearning is not a lack of confidence, as if one is desperately in need of approval. Korn insightfully describes products of craftsmanship as “objects as emissary.” He writes,

The objects I made had significance for me because they embodied my evolving ideas and beliefs. But at the same time, to truly assume the identity of craftsman, I need to inform my social environment so that others would see me that way, too. After all,

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<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 151.

constructing an identity is not a self-contained project. One's sense of self is a fluctuating assemblage of beliefs and feelings strongly influenced by external circumstances, especially the beliefs of other people. To become a craftsman I had to coax the narrative of others down the trail I was blazing. The things I made were emissaries sent out into the world to negotiate on my behalf. They influenced the beliefs of others regarding my occupation and capabilities.<sup>64</sup>

The assertion of reasons through qualities in products is one aspect of participation in a local community. Confidence in one's work does not preclude the desire to join others in conversation about it—to shape and react to others and adjust oneself in light of the conversation. Crawford describes the need for craftsmans' "individuality" to be "expressed in an activity that, in answering to a shared world, connects him to others: the customers he serves and the other practitioners of his art, who are competent to recognize the peculiar excellence of his work."<sup>65</sup> Often the principal judges of the community are part of a specialized group within the community, such as members of guilds and trade unions who serve as sort of middle-men between the craftsman and the community at large.

To summarize this chapter thus far: with regard to products of work, judgment's *direct objects* are the products and their qualities; it's *principle* is goodness in terms of the product's soundness and comeliness; it's *means* is respectful use and fair evaluation; and it's *ends* are, firstly, the affirmation of the person manifested in the product and secondly the judgment of the person *qua* worker. Yet the *origin* of judgment is the producer's address to the consumer/evaluator by means of the product's qualities as reasons made from person to person. Hence, the *subjects* of judgment are both the producer and the consumer as persons. And since anything done for the sake of others in reference to their personhood is an end in itself, such work in judgment is an end in itself.

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<sup>64</sup> Korn, 67.

<sup>65</sup> Crawford, 207-8.

Given the discussion so far, there are three basic higher-order features imposed upon products of work: (1) the manifestation of oneself in the world as a worker for the common good, (2) the claim for recognition from persons as a person *qua* worker, and (3) the claim for a fair judgment in the evaluation of the products (which, when a *positive* judgment results, perfects the work by confirming that it contributed to the common good). All three (i.e, manifestation, recognition, and judgment) are essential for labor to be an end in itself. That is, they are enough to elevate labor into a person-to-person realm of recognition and reason-giving. But a good judgment—that one’s reasons are judged to be good reasons—*perfects* such labor, for labor is completed in the *realization* of its principal end—the good of others. While a negative judgment in a labor-affirming community still affirms the for-others *intention* of the person who produced it (and thereby the *person* who intended), the intention is proven to be ill-suited to the end in view. Such work, despite affirming personhood, remains incomplete.

As I stated in the introductory chapter, the exchange of products, though it is necessary for work to be an end in itself, is only ancillary to that end. Put differently, the artisan does not work for the sake of exchanging the product, as if work is a means to that end; rather the exchange is a condition, not the ground of, the good of meaningful work. The achievement of the good of meaningful work then occurs, at this level of analysis, at a time after the product is completed and only when the product is taken up in the community for use and judgment. The good then is realized retroactively—the worker comes to relate to past work as having been worth doing for its own sake, since the conditions for such work were subsequently met in the community.

## Small-Scale Community

The rational pursuit of work as an end in itself requires, as I've said, working in and for a community. Community is necessary because by it the *I* of the worker becomes a *you* to another, and in that way the work is elevated into personal relations. That is to say, one encounters another in the product of work at the personal level—as an I/you encounter, for as I've argued the product has a higher-order feature that addresses persons. Similarly, a worker can identify with the product as *mine* only if another is able to say *yours*, for a right in relation to a thing is possible only if one can make a claim *against* another. Furthermore, without another to whom one can assert reasons of quality there can be no reasons there at all, for reasons exist only when *between* persons. Indeed, without community a worker saying “I am responsible for this” is futile and, more importantly, meaningless, for having responsibility for something assumes the exclusive possession in some way *among others*. If no one exists who will recognize this responsibility, then there is no actual responsibility. In seeking responsibility in the absence of the requisite community, the worker should be pitied: It is the assertion of an *I* without a reciprocating *you*—a vain, empty, and meaningless assertion of responsibility for the products of labor. The labor and subsequent consumption proved to be impersonal and therefore the labor was but a means to an end—the revenue or wages to sustain further laboring.

We've focused so far on two separate groups, producers and consumers/users, but we must recognize that in personal relations of production *all producers are also consumers*, which means that, in such relations, *the workers work for one another*. That is, they consume or use each other's products of labor in mutual recognition and judgment. Each producer then is reciprocating life to other producers through the reciprocal effect of recognition and judgment.

This is realized by the scale and the nature of the community. Just as the scale of labor is

essential to meaningful work, so too is the scale of the civil community. Instead of a civil environment of boundary-less universalism or cosmopolitanism, the realization of workers working for one another occurs only in particular settings—in small contexts and a people with a sense of local belonging that extends across generations.<sup>66</sup>

#### Hannah Arendt on *homo faber*

A discussion of Arendt's thought on work will help us make further distinctions pertaining to work and community. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt distinguishes the *animal laborans* and the *homo faber*. The former is Marx's laborer under capitalism: one works to eat and eats to work. In labor, products "immediately become...means of subsistence and reproduction of labor power."<sup>67</sup> In "making" (which is her translation of *faber*), however, "the production process comes to an end" in the product. That is, man as maker produces things not for a direct end of powering further labor, but to make an "independent entity [that] has been added to the human artifice." The laborer "never transcends" the labor process, for the laborer is endlessly producing and consuming.<sup>68</sup> Transcending the labor process, for Arendt, is the production of *durable* goods.

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<sup>66</sup> As I said in the introduction, this small-scale requirement is complicated by the internet. The internet permits various forms of communication from great distances, including reviewing, feedback, and marketing. The necessary community that was once possible only in a geographically bounded space is now possible at the global level. But this might actually benefit small-scale producers, who are often unable in modern economies to compete locally with larger firms. Global exposure increases demand. But still face-to-face interaction is generally more honest and authentic, and the producers, as members of the local community, will be able to respond to local needs.

<sup>67</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 143.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

Durability, according to Arendt, gives things “objectivity” that allow them to endure the “voracious needs and wants of their living makers and user.”<sup>69</sup> They “stabilize humans,” allowing people to “retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity.” The *homo faber* creates an enduring world of things to which one goes for meaning and a sense of permanency. Furthermore, the maker of things, says Arendt, “conduct[s] himself as lord and master of the whole earth.” The laborer, on the other hand, is still nature’s servant, for only durable objectified labor transforms nature. Arendt further distinguishes between “consumer goods,” which are for mere life and produced by *animal laborans*, and “use objects,” which are for the human world and produced by *homo faber*. The world of use-objects (durable things) facilitates the production, exchange, and consumption of consumer (or ephemeral) goods.

Contrary to Arendt, my account recognizes that given the type of work and type of community, even those who make products that quickly spoil can transcend the “life-cycle” of production and consumption by entering into a person-to-person realm of reason-giving through their products. The loaf produced by a baker must be consumed quickly after production, but it still can facilitate a person-to-person reciprocation and thereby raise the labor to an end in itself. This work then is not only a means to continue working, though it certainly does that. The product of that work also serves as a means of recognition and judgment of the person *qua* worker. The product’s lack of durability is irrelevant in this regard. Arendt’s distinction between *animal laborans* and *homo faber* then does not apply to my account of small-scale production. Indeed, people today who conduct *homo faber*, according to her definition, work in large-scale settings and therefore have little to no connection to their products. If my account of meaningful work is correct, then the local baker conducts more meaningful work than most manufacturing laborers.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 137.

But Arendt's distinction is still useful, for even though the products of both ephemeral labor and durable labor can facilitate personal reciprocity, the durability of the durable products permits an extension of life embodied in the product and creates a *human* world.

Arendt was quite right that "without a world [of relative permanence] into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species."<sup>70</sup> The production of durable goods provides the "reality and reliability of the human world." It is "world-building."<sup>71</sup> This is the "thing-character" of the social world. Arendt did not say, but could have, that in identifying with one's product and in society's identification of the producer through it, the producer in a way remains in the community post-mortem. Not only do the products themselves remain after death, the producer endures in the world as work objectified, as if memory is lodged in the things left behind. The very familiarity one has with the world is a result of the dead's abiding work existing in the present for the living. It "give[s] rise to the familiarity of the world, its customs and habits of intercourse between men and things as well as between men and men," writes Arendt.<sup>72</sup>

This generational significance of durable goods causes people to labor for *future* others (viz. the unborn) in their production, not only for living others. As Crawford states, "People who make their own furniture will tell you that it is hard to justify economically, and yet they persist. Shared memories attach to the material souvenirs of our lives, and producing them is a kind of communion, with others and with the future." Thus the person works for the good of those both present and future, seeking the recognition even from those not yet born. Production of durable

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<sup>70</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 97.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 95-6.

<sup>72</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 95.

goods, therefore, transcends both the life-cycle of the *animal laborans* and the present. In effect, the presence of these workers endures past their death in the things they made.

Hence, meaningful work serves as a connection between the dead, living, and unborn—what Edmund Burke called the “eternal society.”<sup>73</sup> It is a community that exudes in its built environment the dead-living-unborn mutual connection: a living people, whose work is made possible by the abiding contributions of the dead, working to welcome the future generations.

Communities often know only temporarily, if at all, who made this and that thing. We are usually ignorant of who made, for example, *this* sidewalk or who planted *this* tree. So it would seem that our limited knowledge impedes our ability to recognize and affirm others in their work across generations. This is true however only in reference to the *individual* level: *I* or *she* did this. At the collective level, a people would simply say *we* made this—the one has become subsumed into the collective. The totality of one’s particular relations—family, community, etc.—is bound up in the products of work such that these things belong to us as we belong to the producer. After all, if the worker can relate to products as manifestations of labor in the world, then family members can relate to those products as they relate to the worker (e.g., family heirlooms). And what about nations? If we can relate to one another as a combined people, then each can relate to

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<sup>73</sup> "Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure — but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico, or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence, because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of *eternal society*, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place." *Reflections*, 96-7.

the product according to that relation. Mistreatment of some product would, therefore, affect all, not only the producer. Three conclusions seem to follow: 1) we can identify with the goodness of a fellow member's meaningful labor as in some sense *our* work; 2) recognizing one as a person *qua* worker recognizes all; and 3) the judgment upon the product is pronounced on all of us. This explains why dumping French wine into the gutter might offend the citizens of France.

Affirmation of work seems therefore to be a collective one. It is a total social fact or, to use Mauss's term, it is part of the "the gift"—the pervasive norms of reciprocation that transcend the individual through generations. Instead of having only one person in mind in working, in a personal relations of production the person is subsumed under the social such that *all work for all*; and the society in turn collectively recognizes and affirms the goodness of *our* work, a sort of giving back to themselves the rejuvenation of life—a collective will to live. In this socio-economic system there is therefore no strict requirement for face-to-face feedback (though certainly this would still occur); nor is work principally an end in itself retroactively. The recognition and affirmation of one as a person *qua* worker is part of the collective affirmation of itself as a distinct and stable people. Hence, it is not a matter of *I* and *you*. Rather it is a matter of *we*—*we* have responsibility for all of this.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

More could be said about the community and how work relates to generational linkages. We must leave undeveloped here a detailed account of the civil order that coheres best with this view of work. It certainly lends itself to certain “third-way” perspectives, such as the “economic humanism” of Schumacher, the humane economy of Wilhelm Ropke,<sup>74</sup> the “gift economy” model, and distributism, among others.<sup>75</sup> The thought of social theorists, such as Jacques Ellul, who critiqued the “technique” in the liberal order,<sup>76</sup> and Wendell Berry<sup>77</sup> and Joel Salatin, who have criticized corporate farming practices and other features of modern economic life, cohere well with my account of meaningful work. Even some small-scale liberal economic orders could work as well. However, I see nothing in my account that necessarily condemns wage systems, property, or the market exchange, though versions of each would prove detrimental or destructive of meaningful work. Furthermore, there can be instances of personal relations of production in local communities and perhaps in isolated establishments even in the most deracinated of liberal economies. But there is no room to discuss all this in detail.

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<sup>74</sup> Ropke writes, “If we want to be steadfast in this struggle, it is high time to bethink ourselves of the ethical foundations of our own economic system. To this end, we need a combination of supreme moral sensitivity and economic knowledge. Economically ignorant moralism is as objectionable as morally callous economism. Ethics and economics are two equally difficult subjects, and while the former needs discerning and expert reason, the latter cannot do without humane values.” *A Humane Economy*, 103-4.

<sup>75</sup> Allan C. Carlson, *Third Ways: How Bulgarian Greens, Swedish Housewives, and Beer-Swilling Englishmen Created Family-Centered Economies--and Why They Disappeared* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

<sup>77</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977).

I've emphasized that meaningful work requires a community seeking forms of life in common that, at least in some small way, distinguishes them from others, not in a jingoistic fashion, but as a quiet, peaceful, and self-affirming community pursuing the common good across generations. In such a community, people know each other as more than individuals in mutual alliance for self-interest; rather they are a people desiring to communicate one to another their gifts for the best collective life possible—to live well. Meaningful work plays a central role in that. As E. F. Schumacher rightfully said in *Small is Beautiful*,

Above anything else there is need for a proper philosophy of work which understands work not as that which it has indeed become, an inhuman chore as soon as possible to be abolished by automation, but as something 'decreed by Providence for the good of man's body and soul.' Next to the family, it is work and the relationships established by work that are the true foundations of society.<sup>78</sup>

But replacing the foundation of society is as hard as it looks. Still, when looking closely, there are places in the Western world that fight for meaningful work. One example will suffice.

There is a small restaurant in Oxford, Alabama called Garfrerick's Café. Here the excellent food is complemented by an atmosphere of collective ownership. The workers do not, to my knowledge, own as legal property any portion of the business, but the restaurant owner has brought them into the life of the business. The chefs cook in a sizable portion of the main floor separated only by a row of seating similar to bar seating. This allows diners to interact with the chefs and compliment directly to them on the quality of the food. It brings everyone into a producer/consumer relationship that affirms everyone involved. Added to this, the small farm associated with the restaurant, owned by the restaurant owner and from which comes much of the food served there, is a place of learning for the chefs, waiters and bartenders. The owner brings them into the farm-to-table process. It is an option for the workers to join this process by visiting and working on the farm. The workers then are part of a family of sorts in which the

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<sup>78</sup> Schumacher, 38. See also Schumacher's *Good Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

satisfaction of the customer satisfies the family. The owner has deliberately followed an important principle: he has brought his workers into face-to-face relations with their customers to confirm the qualities of their work.

This essay then is firstly not a critique of the current economic order, though it does that in consequence. Too many critiques of current conditions call for grand political schemes with ends that are hopeless to realize or wildly impractical and even violently disruptive. My account of meaningful work however establishes a way forward that can find partial realization in little unseen ways—in the quotidian aspects of life with face-to-face interactions in praising others for their work and in expressions of gratitude to those who worked before us.

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## **Vita**

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